EPISCOPAL DIVINITY SCHOOL

Thesis

EUCHARISTIC LITURGY AS EMANCIPATORY PERFORMANCE: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INDIAN STREET THEATRE

BY

SUSAN ACKLEY

M Phil, Columbia University, 1974
MA, Columbia University, 1971

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the

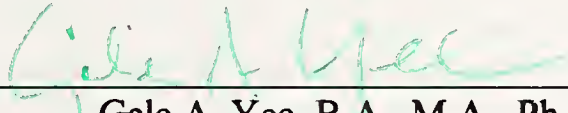requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF DIVINITY
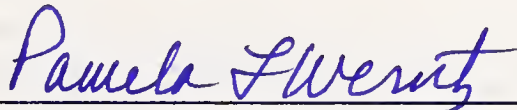
1999

Approved by

Supervisor _____

Christopher Duraisingh, B.A., B.D., M.Th., Th.D, D.D.
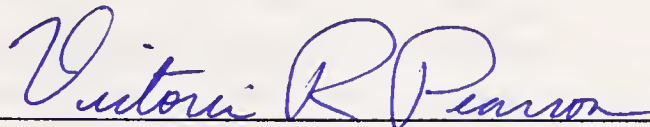Professor of Applied Theology

First Reader _____

Gale A. Yee, B.A., M.A., Ph.D
Interim Director of Studies in Feminist Liberation Theologies
and Visiting Associate Professor of Hebrew Bible and
Women's Studies

Second Reader _____

Pamela Werntz
M Div III

Third Reader _____

Victoria Pearson
M Div II

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In July, 1998, I travelled to South India on a grant from the Seminary Consultation on Mission. The focus of my work was the use of street theatre in India as a tool in the struggle for liberation. This project arose partly out of a life-long passion for performance which led me to a career as a professional puppeteer, writing, designing, and performing productions based on folk tales. I was inspired, as well, by my developing commitment to mission understood as *missio Dei*, the "saving love of the suffering God,"[1] whose task is to create a "human community in which the forces of love, justice, and peace may prevail over the powers of hate, oppression, and inhumanity."[2]

While I was still in India I became fascinated with the question of the relationship between the socially committed theatre work I was encountering—which I saw as very much a collaboration with the *missio Dei*—and sacramental liturgy. While street theatre and sacramental liturgy may seem radically disparate, I became convinced that they are in fact intimately linked in at least four ways: a. they are performances; b. they aim to be effective; c. the intended effect is transformation, and d. the nature of the hoped-for

---

[1]C. S. Song, "An Asian View of Mission," in *Christian Mission, Jewish Mission* ed. Martin A. Cohen and Helga Croner (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 171.

[2]Ibid., 185.

transformation is expressed by a family of terms including 'liberation,' 'emancipation,' 'salvation,' and 'redemption. With the example of Indian street theatre before me, I began to question why that other kind of effective performance, sacramental liturgy, often seems to ignore suffering, suppress or disembody hope, and promote stasis rather than transformation. This paper is an attempt to look at Eucharistic liturgy through the lens of Indian street theatre, with the hope that the latter will suggest specific ways to re-form the performance of Eucharistic liturgies so that they may more effectively mediate the sacramental promise of liberation/salvation.

During my time in India, I was confronted starkly with the unearned privilege that accrues to me by virtue of being a middle-class Euro-American woman. In my work on this paper, I have been continually aware of the incongruity of my voice as *this* woman, addressing others with similar privilege, making use of the insights gained from my experience with a theatre performed for and often by people who live on the edge of survival, without what I consider basic necessities, excluded from the dominant society, marginalized, expendable. I have realized the extent to which I lead a protected life, in which the risks I take are mostly professional and are cushioned by an underlying economic security.

The encounters I had in India and the layers of realization I have passed through during the writing of this thesis have precipitated over time a kind of conversion experience. I have always loved liturgy passionately. Now, as a result of my experiences over the past year, my commitment to the search for more emancipatory performance, to

more powerful evocations of the liberative heart of liturgy for both privileged and

nonprivileged groups of worshippers, has come more and more to define my sense of

vocation.

CHAPTER 1

INDIAN STREET THEATRE AS EMANCIPATORY EFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE

Packed into a Landrover, the performers travel out at dusk from the small city of

Tumkur in south India. Once out of the city, they leave the main road and travel along

narrower roads with fields of bananas and rice on either side. Women walk along the

edge of the road with jars of water on their heads; here a boy drives home a few cows;

there a group of girls trots alongside a herd of goats. An oxcart creaks by, piled with hay.

The truck stops at a cross roads and two more actors tuck themselves into the truck. The

truck turns up a rough road, past a village temple, past small clay and cinderblock houses,

then passes through an oddly clear area—no buildings at all—and the road narrows even

more. That blank space is a boundary between the first, slightly more affluent looking

village where the people belonging to the four Hindu castes live, and the village reserved

for the Dalits, the "Untouchables," who are, according to the Hindu world view both

outside the "Hindu human community"[3] and a source of ritual pollution to caste Hindus.

---

[3]Sathianathan Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity: Subaltern Religions and Liberation Theology in India* (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1998), 18. The word 'Dalit' means "'oppressed,' 'broken,' and 'crushed,' which most realistically describes the lives of almost all of those who are part of this cluster of communities" (ibid). The term has been self-chosen and self-applied by people belonging to this group, as the term "black" was by African- Americans during the 1960's Civil Rights movement in the United States.

The truck bumps down one more street, slowed by people from the village who call to the actors through the windows, and walk along with the truck until it pulls over. The performers pile out, straighten their simple costumes of white pants, long white tops and red sashes, pull their drums and a few props out of the truck. Suddenly the mood is festive, as the actors and villagers make their way in a laughing, bantering procession to a tiny central "square" lit only by a single electric light on a pole. Little girls dance to pop music blaring from a loudspeaker as men and women pull out logs for seats or crowd together on mats or on the dusty ground. The performers form a circle in the middle of the space, sitting cross legged, some with their frame drums on their laps. The playing area defined by the circle of actors is tiny, no larger than 10' in diameter. The space feels intimate

Ramanna, the leader of the performer and composer of the songs and plays, starts to drum and sing. His style is forceful—he drives the song out, his intensity heightening the excitement. Then the first play begins: A Dalit couple borrows 5,000 rupees from the rich landowner for whom they work. To seal the bargain, the man puts his thumb print on a blank paper. When they succeed in selling enough produce to pay back the money they borrowed, he tells them "no, no, look at this contract—you borrowed 15,000 rupees." The couple is on the brink of losing the tiny piece of land they own to their wealthy boss in repayment of the "debt," but they are saved through an act of Dalit solidarity: their friends accompany the couple to the landowner and threaten that they'll go to the police. Intimidated, the landowner relents and declares the debt fully paid.

The story unfolds through acted scenes using both dialogue and mime, alternating with songs led by Ramanna in a popular call-and-response form in which the audience joins the actors in singing the response. Each scene builds to a climax, and at the most intense moment of threat or violence, the actors freeze, holding their pose while the other performers sing a commentary on the action.

Play follows play late into the night, vignettes from a life of hard agricultural labor—11 hours a day in the fields, six or seven days a week; poverty—in this work they earn less than $100 per year; violence, exclusion, oppression. In one play, a father sells his children into bonded labor, a form of virtual slavery. The refrain of the song is "Daddy, please let me go to school." Another, called "Untouchability," begins with a Dalit man fainting from the heat. A friend dips a towel into a caste community well, an act which, since Dalits are from the caste Hindu point of view ritually impure, "pollutes" the well. When the friend is caught he's dragged before a *panchayat* or "court" of caste people and falsely accused. Meanwhile, three men from the village plot to rape his wife.

During the plays, the members of the audience frequently sit absorbed, sometimes laugh, often comment to each other about what is happening, Toddlers wander about; every once in a while a man who has been drinking off in the shadows shouts out an insult.

Finally, the performance ends. Mothers, exhausted from working in the fields all day, pick up sleeping babies and shoo their older children in front of them toward their homes. A few people stay and talk with the performers about the plays or what is

happening in their lives. The performers—themselves Dalits from villages nearby who work in the fields during the days—pack their drums back in the truck and drive away. They'll hop out one by one at their villages along the way back to Tumkur.

An Introduction to Indian Street Theatre

This street theatre performance took place last July in a Dalit village in the district of Tumkur in the south Indian state of Karnataka. Ramanna, a composer and playwright who is himself a Dalit, is on the staff of a social action group called REDS, the Rural Education Development Society, which is dedicated to the empowerment of Dalits and which uses street performance as an integral part of its efforts.

A closer look at several features of the REDS performance will serve as an introductory overview of Indian street theatre in general.[4] First, the production was initiated and supported by a nongovernmental organization (NGO) and it was created and performed by Dalits for Dalits. Second, the topics of the performance were drawn from the sorts of events with which the members of the audience have to contend in their daily life. Third, the performance made use of forms of theatre rooted in the folk tradition. Fourth, the small plays represented not personal conflicts, but structural oppression. A

---

[4]In this paper, I will be using "street theatre" in the Indian context to refer to a kind of politically oriented theatre. This is a common usage, both in India and elsewhere, although other terms are used, including "Popular Theatre" (by Jacob Srampickal, *Voice to the Voiceless: The Power of People's Theatre in India* [London: Hurst & Company, 1994]) and "Theatre of Liberation" (by Eugène Van Erven, *The Playful Revolution* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992).

brief look at each of these characteristics—the performers, the kinds of events which generate the performances, the forms used, and the focus or object of the performances—will open up for us something of the history and character of contemporary Indian street theatre.

Performers in Indian Street Theatre

The REDS performance is fairly typical of Indian political street theatre in that the "cultural team" of nonprofessional street theatre performers is sponsored by an NGO or social action group as one face of its outreach program. It is difficult for Western observers to realize the extent to which drama is considered an intrinsic part of work for social change in India. For example, in the manual designed by REDS for its extensive training program to empower Dalit villagers for political action, the first two items in the list of skills to be developed are songs and dramas, "especially street plays."[5] Since before India's struggle for independence, social activists and writers have been creating plays designed to be performed for and in some cases by poor and working-class people. Theatre historian Jacob Srampickal considers pivotal actions connected with the Indian struggle for independence as forms of street theatre: ". . . Gandhi's Salt March at Dandi (1930) . . . contained elements normally associated with street theatre. The march and the picking up of the salt was a staging. It was a community activity involving actors and

---

[5]M.C. Raj, *Participatory Training Methodology: A Process and Content for Empowerment* (Madras: Dialogue Group, no date), p. 37.

audience and asserting the public's rights against the threats of an oppressor."[6] An overtly

theatrical and highly influential nationwide movement began with the founding in 1942

of IPTA (Indian People's Theatre Association) by the Communist Party of India. With an

explicit agenda of spreading "nationalist and socialist ideals,"[7] IPTA sent performing

groups to both cities and rural areas to perform for working-class and peasant groups

After independence, IPTA and other left-wing groups continued to perform, while the

new government formed the SDD, the Song and Drama Division, whose aim, according

to Srampickal, was to "promote national unity and to persuade the rural poor to accept

reformist and government controlled ways for dealing with problems like population

explosion, poverty, casteism, bonded labor, lack of housing and illiteracy."[8]

While social action groups have included dramatic performances as an intrinsic

part of their outreach efforts, theatre activists—actors, writers, and directors—have also

created important street theatre productions. One of the best known independent street

theatre groups is Janam, founded in New Delhi by Safdar Hashmi in the early 1970's.

Janam, whose name means "the people" in the sense of the masses or the oppressed, was

primarily known for its performances on behalf of industrial workers. In January, 1989,

Hashmi was murdered, allegedly at the behest of right wing politicians, during a

---

[6]Srampickal, 102.

[7]Ibid., 47.

[8]Ibid, 49.

9

performance of a Janam play whose theme was the government's repression of the labor movement.

In the cases of the social action groups and theatre practitioners, Indian street theatre is performed primarily by middle-class or possibly working-class people *for* those who are poor, or excluded from power in the society by the caste system or by gender. But there is an active movement in which theatre artists or social action groups teach the villagers themselves the skills to make plays based on their own life circumstances. Ross Kidd and Mamunur Rashid, two theatre activists who have worked extensively throughout Asia to spread this kind of theatre, describe their experience of the impact of doing this kind of theatre on a community of oppressed people:

> Getting the landless laborers to do the work transformed the whole process: the laborers' doing the 'acting' . . . could become the first aware-ness-raising and confidence-building step in their taking real action. The activity of drama-making could become a group-building experience in which participants deepened their understanding, bolstered their morale, and developed the courage and organizational unity to fight for their rights.[9]

An interesting technique which combines actor-generated and "people"-generated street theatre is for the performers to throw the story open to audience comment or direct participation at some point in the action. In a street theatre production created in response to the burning of a mosque by Hindu fundamentalists in December 1993, a group of

---

[9]Ross Kidd and Mamunur Rashid, "People's Theatre and Landless Organizing in Bangladesh," in *Social Activists and People's Movements*, ed. Walter Fernandes (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1985), 73.

theatre activists in Madras created a play based on a familiar folktale in which a king

must solve a riddle posed by a ghost. The actor playing the king can't answer the question

why the mosque was burned. The ghost then turns to the audience and asks them the

riddle, opening a conversation between the actors and audience and members of the

audience with each other.[10] In a play raising the issue of female infanticide, created by the

director Mungai (V. Padma) and her troupe, Voicing Silence, the performers act out

several alternative ways a pregnant wife and husband might react to the knowledge that

the baby the woman is carrying is a girl. Then they simply stop the action and turn the

question to the audience: what should the couple do? The highly charged, emotional

discussion that follows touches upon not only female infanticide but the related problem

of dowry.[11]

In this brief look at Indian street theatre from the point of view of the performers,

we have noted three kinds of performers: a. social activists for whom performance is one

phase of their social outreach, b. theatre artists, and c. people who are themselves

oppressed and create performances out of their day-to-day lives. A combined form

involves the enlisting of audience's active participation in the outcome of the play.

The Experiential Sources of Indian Street Theatre

---

[10]Palani, interview by author, Madras, 16 July, 1998. (Note: in South India, it is not
unusual for people to be known by a single name.)

[11]Mungai, *Pacha Manu [The New Born]* (Madras: M.S. Swaminathan Research
Foundation, 1997), video recording.

No matter who performs Indian street theatre, however, it is essential that the content of the performances arises from the experience of oppressed people. Indian street theatre performances arise out of and speak directly to the daily experience of the *janam*, the people. The men and women to whom the REDS cultural team was playing earn between 10 and 15 rupees a day (approximate 20 to 30 cents per day) for 11 or 12 hour days in the fields. They often find themselves caught in situations—a house needing repair, an illness, the marriage of a daughter—in which they must borrow money and the large landowner for whom they work is the only resource. After one performance I witnessed, the villagers and REDS actors and staff talked late into the night about what sorts of responses to this kind of situation were open to them. The penalty for failing to repay the debt is frequently the loss of the little land they possess. Standing up to the landlord would mean the loss of employment in those fields and possible blackballing by landowners in the surrounding area. The other plays that night also spoke to their situation: children *are* sold into bonded labor; as Dalits they *are* in danger of being raped, assaulted, and even murdered for perceived transgressions of caste boundaries or simply for being Dalit.

Use of Folk Theatre Forms

A third characteristic of Indian street theatre is the integration of folk theatre forms into the performance. In the REDS performance, the use of song and of somewhat formalized body movements echoed in simpler form the elaborate dance and mime plays

of the folk tradition. For many street theatre performers, whether theatre professionals or members of social action groups, the use of folk theatre forms intensifies the power of their plays to communicate with the audience. One activist theatre group in Madras invited a Sri Lankan director, Ilaya Bathmanatan, to teach them techniques drawn from the rich folk performance traditions of Tamil Nadu, the geographic and linguistic region within which Madras is located.[12] Under Bathmanatan's influence, the troupe began to incorporate more traditional forms—dance, music, costumes, body movement, and makeup—in its political street performances. Palani, a young actor who participated in the training program, noticed a clear difference in the response of the audience to the forms which were rooted in their folk tradition. "The use of traditional forms involved people much more," he noted. "These are *their* forms, they link to *their* identity."[13]

A powerful example of the use of folk and even classical performance forms is the *Kala Jatha* (Art Procession) of the Kerala Sastra Sahituya Parishad (KSSP). The KSSP is a nongovernmental voluntary organization, formed in 1957 in Kerala in south India as a "people's science moment," which now focusses primarily on the search for alternative models of development to those promulgated by the Indian government or international agencies.[14] Organizers found that mass media and even personal visitation were

---

[12]Tamil Sri Lanka shares the same cultural and linguistic folk culture as Tamil Nadu.

[13]Palani, interview by author. Chennai (Madras), 8 July 1998.

[14]Sham P. Thomas, "The Use of Various Media for Development with Special Reference to the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad" (M Th. thesis, Tamilnadu Theological Seminary,

inadequate for achieving their aim. Instead they discovered that "it is the traditional media which can help Parishad to reach out to this people [peasants and working class] who are to be the initiators and masters of development."[15] Artists have adapted a wide variety of indigenous performance forms including classical temple dances, folk drama, and storytelling, to address the themes of "the power of science, the need to free science from the vested interests, . . ., health, pollution, education, development, . . . , corruption, self-reliance, etc."[16] Then several times a year, actors, singers, and dancers participate in a *Kala Jatha* "procession" which travels throughout the state of Kerala, performing these pieces in public spaces. Of all the modes of communication used by the KSSP, the use of traditional media was ranked by Keralites familiar with Parashad as significantly more effective than any other media used by the group. In fact, ". . . irrespective of gender, age, education, and professional differences the respondents consider traditional media as the most effective means of communication."[17] Among the reasons respondents gave for preferring traditional media were that it is "our own cultural form" which is accessible to all, involves direct contact, and communicates through enacting people's problems.[18]

Madurai, India, 1996), 45.

[15]Ibid., 104.

[16]Ibid. 105.

[17]Ibid., 127. It must be noted that in the survey cited, younger respondents ranked traditional media slightly lower than "group media," i.e., interpersonal contact (126-7).

[18]Ibid., 132-3.

Challenges Oppressive Social Structures

The final characteristic of Indian street theatre is exemplified in the REDS

performance described above and present in the other examples I have cited: while they

are emotionally powerful in their presentation of personal suffering, this suffering is

understood and presented as arising out of unjust social structures. From Gandhi's Salt

March to the IPPA performances of the Indian Communist Party to the current flourishing

of street theatre as an arm of the movement for Dalit liberation, Indian street theatre has

been a "radical" movement in the sense of "acts that question or re-envision ingrained

social arrangements of power."[19] In the play described in the introduction, the village

audience understands that the couple's plight and the risk to their land is not (simply) a

crisis for the couple which is "their own fault," but is a result of the linked oppressions of

caste and class structure in contemporary India which must be addressed through Dalit

solidarity. As Jacob Srampickal says about the response of Indian street theatres to the

Bhopal gas tragedy, "while the official media were content with providing statistics on

the extent of the damage, it was the street theatre groups who focused the attention of the

people on the wider aspects of exploitation by multinationals and the continuing horrors

---

[19]Jan Cohen-Cruz, *Radical Street Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 1. I would amend this definition to read, "acts that question *and* envision . . . arrangements of power."

of the tragedy."[20] Pralayan, founder of the street theatre troupe Chennai (Madras) Kalai

Kuzhu, makes the overt political thrust of this kind of work perfectly clear when he says,

"Why do street theatre? We do it because of its mobility, handiness, cost-effectiveness,

because it is close to people and not confined to any particular kind of space. But why do

we *choose* to do street theatre? The answer is always political, it has to be."[21] In other

words, Pralayan and other Indian street theatre performers understand themselves to be

committed to a political vocation, indeed a *radical* political vocation which challenges

and re-envisions the structures of power in Indian society.

Indian Street Theatre as Radical Performance

Why, in India and elsewhere, do social action groups and other liberation

movements use street theatre as an integral part of their efforts to change the political and

cultural structures of society? In the case of India, can the pervasiveness of this use of

theatre be attributed simply to a millennia-long cultural history in which an incredible

diversity of dramatic and dance forms have flourished?[22] It is my position that while the

existence of this theatrical tradition provides a deep source of inspiration for Indian

───────────────

[20]Srampickal, 211.

[21]Pralayan, "Why do we choose to do street theatre?," *Seagull Theatre Quarterly* 16 (Dec., 1997), 74.

[22]Srampickal lists 77 "major folk theatre forms" in India. *Voice*, 61.

activists,[23] they find street theatre an effective instrument of social change because of the very nature of performance itself. In this section I will begin to clarify this position by examining the notions of performance and radical performance.

Performance

What are the primary characteristics of performance? During the past decades a great deal of work has been done in the theory of performance by both anthropologists like Victor Turner and theorists of theatre and I will draw on this work in my analysis of the nature of performance.

1. Performance is first of all *embodied action in space and time.*[24] It is not a daydream or phantasm; it involves physical objects—including human bodies—in relation to one another in space, and it is temporal or processual—it begins, goes on, and comes to an end. The anthropologist Victor Turner discerns this processual quality of performance in the very etymology of the word: "*Performance* . . . is derived from the Middle English *parfournen*, later *parfourmen*, which is itself from the Old French *parfournir*-—*par* ('thoroughly') plus *fournir* ('to furnish')-—hence *performance* does not have the

---

[23]A poster for "Koothu-P-Pattarai," an influential, socially committed theatre in Chennai (Madras), features a photo of a performer of *theru-kootu* (a traditional theatre form in Tamil Nadu) and a poem: "Theru-k-kootu, our pride, our source of new aesthetics. Let us celebrate its joy, its dance, its glory everywhere."

[24]In this study I am restricting 'performance' to refer to those performances which involve human actors (as such or augmented, for example, with masks or puppets).

structuralist implication of manifesting *form*, but rather the processual sense of 'bringing to completion' or 'accomplishing.' To *perform* is thus to complete a more or less involved process rather than to do a single deed or act."[25]

As embodied and processual, performances are *complex acts* involving bodies, movements, space, colors and shapes, sounds, atmosphere, pace, rhythm, and plot or "flow." Performances "play with" or "play through" a multiplicity of elements which have been (to some extent at least) deliberately organized and ordered. Performances are "symbolic," in the suggestive etymological sense of that word: in making a performance all sorts of elements are creatively "thrown together" to make a dynamic whole.[26]

2. *Communication is intrinsic to performance.* A performance is a communication event:

a. It as*sumes an observer*; it is "that kind of doing in which the observation of the deed is an essential part of its doing, even if the observer be invisible or is the performer herself."[27] In the example of the performance in the Dalit village described above, it was the gathering of the audience which signalled that there would in fact be a performance—the "talk-through" rehearsal of the play by the actors in the truck beforehand would not count as a performance.

---

[25]Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982), 91.

[26]Jyoti Sahi, *The Child and the Serpent: Reflections on Popular Indian Symbols* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1980), 18.

[27]Tom Driver, *The Magic of Ritual* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), 81.

b. It is *understood as a performance by the performers.* Schechner identifies this characteristic of performance as "twice-behaved behavior," or "known and/or practiced behavior."[28] This does not require a written text or formal rehearsal; depending on the nature of the performance, the performers may need only consciously follow a set of rules, as, for example, in sports or theatrical improvisation.[29] But whether the performance is based on a text or generated from improvisation, the performers must intend to communicate to the observers or audience, must "play" to them.

c. It is a communication *within a particular system of symbols, meanings, and conventions.* If there were not a shared system of conventions, the event would not even be experienced as "a performance," but merely as a sequence of behaviors. As the theatre director and theorist Richard Schechner has observed, ". . . what is performed is encoded—I want to say nested, trapped, contained, distilled, held, restrained, metaphorized—in one or more *special kinds of communication:* either as a mixture of narrative and Hindu temple service as in Ramlila, or as fixed narrative and individual creativity as in any . . . productions of, say, Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard . . .*"[30] And

---

[28]Schechner, *Performative Circumstances: From the Avant Garde to Ramlila* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1983), 91.

[29]The recent film, *The Truman Show*, in which a young man is unaware that his "reality" is a television show in which all the other characters are actors, tests this condition of performance. However, the fact that at least some of those involved know that they are performing does qualify it as a performance in my sense.

[30]Richard Schechner, *Performative Circumstances,* 90.

without shared symbols and meanings, no communication at all can take place. For example, a Eucharist performed in a Hindu village or a *theru-kootu* dance performed on the streets of Cambridge may be considered simply as odd, incomprehensible sets of behavior or even if they are recognized as performances, they will not be apprehended as the performers mean them to be.[31]

In this section, we have looked at performance from the perspective of performance theory and seen that a performance is a complex, embodied, processual event which intrinsically involves communication among observers and self-aware performers within a shared system of symbols, conventions, and meanings. While this may seem a quite abstract way to understand an event as vital, sensuous, and exciting as an actual performance, I believe that this point of view begins to hint at the sources of the power of performance, the power which Indian street theatre counts on to effect social change.

Radical Performance

In my discussion of Indian street theatre above I invoked a definition of "radical" as "acts that question and re-envision ingrained social arrangements of power."[32] It might be well to push the definition even farther, modifying it to read, "acts that *challenge* and

---

[31]See John Heilpern, *Conference of the Birds: The Story of Peter Brook in Africa* (London: Faber, 1977) for an amusing and illuminating example of a European experimental theatre troupe touring African villages in search of "universal theatre."

[32]Adapted from Cohen-Cruz, *Radical Street Performance*, 1.

re-envision . . . ." This would draw on the etymology of the word 'radical.' to convey the fact that "radical" performances aim at social changes at the very "root" of society.

The definition I am working with derives from a discussion of radical street performance by the theatre activist and theorist Jan Cohen-Cruz. Radical performance in Cohen-Cruz' sense covers a wide variety of historical and contemporary performances, all of which challenge and re-envision the prevailing power structures: the theatrical plays of the 20th century German playwright Bertolt Brecht, who exposed the stage machinery and required his actors not to express the feelings of the characters they played but rather their own critical attitudes towards the characters-—all in order to break down the empathy the audience might feel for the characters and provoke instead critical, political reflection on the social situations underlying the dramatic events; the rallies and marches of the Ku Klux Klan and the Third Reich, both intending to advance the hegemony of a "master race"; the silent vigils of Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, mourning their sons and daughters who "disappeared" during the Dirty War in Argentina; the Dalit village performance we looked at above; and, finally, even the prophetic performances in the Hebrew Scriptures-—I think especially of Ezekiel, lying on his left side for 390 days in the city center next to a miniature construction representing the siege of Jerusalem, all as "a sign for the house of Israel" (Ez. 4:1-4).

How does radical performance relate to the analysis of performance developed in the last section? Let us look briefly at how the elements of performance in general are instantiated in radical performance.

First, like all performances, radical performances are complex, processual embodiments in space and time. But the embodiments presented in radical performance have two characteristics distinguishing them from other performances: 1. since they are by definition in a more or less explicit confrontation with the power structures of the particular social context with which they are being performed, the content—the characters, plots, arrangements of the playing space, songs, etc.--—is constructed *in opposition to specific social facts.* This may be accomplished in a variety of ways. In the Dalit performance described above, for example, the foreman of the landlord was a buffoon, and even as he conspired with the landlord to cheat the peasants, he was an object of ridicule for the audience whom they could disempower through laughter. 2. Radical performances to some extent *re-envision alternative social structures.* In the dramatic world of the performance, Dalit peasants stood together in solidarity and thereby saved the couple's land. While this may not (yet) have happened in daily reality, it has at least come to be within the performance. This is a crucial feature of the effectiveness of radical performance which I will discuss in detail below.

Second, the nature of the performance as a communication event between performers and audience also takes on a distinctive character in radical performance. 1. The performers are aware of themselves and their actions with respect to *two different sets of actual or potential observers*—those who are relatively powerless in the society and those who are beneficiaries and/or agents of "ingrained social arrangements of power," in Cohen-Cruz' phrase. Radical performance is by its nature a challenge; it

"draws people who comprise a contested reality into what its creators hope will be a changing script."[33] Even when a radical performance is played before an audience which supports the position expressed in it, there exists a potential audience of persons hostile to the critique it embodies. Radical performances can mean real risk for both performers and audience. 2. In radical performances, the *relationship between the performers and the observers*, while often beginning as a neutral relationship, is often intended to be changed during the course of the performance. In some cases the performers hope to enlist from the audience fellow workers for social change. In others, the performers try to enter into a fuller, more personal relationship with the audience through the performance. For example, in Mungai's street theatre play about female infanticide,[34] the performance begins and ends in lively human contact between performers and audience. The performers laugh, converse, and sing with the villagers as they walk to the performance space, literally entering into the audience's social world. And then the performance "ends" with an open discussion by actors and villagers.

In this section, we have seen that radical performance has significant properties which distinguish it from other kinds of performance. It is created to stand in opposition to prevailing social structures and to pose alternatives to them. As a communication event, the performers play implicitly or explicitly both to those who are oppressed by

---

[33]Ibid.

[34]See page 11 above.

existing social arrangements and to those who benefit, and the relationship between performers and audience changes through the duration of the performance.

The Ontological Complexity of Performance

When the REDS performers, in the tiny bit of village street that was their "stage," began to enact the story of the Dalit couple being cheated by the wealthy landowner, a set of profound changes took place. The performance layered, upon the ordinary daily life of the village and within that dusty little circle where the story was being played, a different space and time, the space and time of the embodied story. The actors, whom the audience knew as fellow peasants, became at the same time other people—the landowner, foreman, couple, supporters. The relationship of acquaintances and social equals became overlayed with different kinds of relationships—that between the performers and the audience, and, among the performers, the different social relationships they were enacting.

This layering of dramatic space and time upon daily space and time, of assumed character upon ordinary identity, of new patterns of relationship upon normal patterns is at the heart of performance and is a primary source of its power to effect change. I call this pivotal characteristic the *ontological complexity* of performance. In the ontological complexity of a performance, new realities come to be. They do not replace ordinary lived reality, but are conjoined in, layered with, a wider reality composed of *both* the dramatic and the daily worlds. For the duration of the performance both worlds are real and so is

24

their coexistence.[35]

The ontological complexity of performance allows it to be effective primarily by providing the opportunity for looseness, slippage, imbalance—in a performance event, reality is no longer "all of a piece" because other possibilities are brought into existence, As Richard Schechner says, we may identify in performances the "recurrent theme" of "'provisionality,' the unsteadiness, slipperiness, porosity, unreliability, and ontological riskiness of the realities projected or created by playing."[36] There is a certain amount of "play" in the integral reality comprised of the coexistent realities of the dramatic and the quotidian worlds; because of this the ordinary, accepted, commonsensical world can be "toyed with" and alternatives "entertained."[37] Once this has happened, situations and structures which have been taken for granted in the ordinary world, the world of "common sense," are rendered contingent and questionable.

This experience of imbalance or slipperiness due to the juxtaposition of dramatic and ordinary realities into a new reality can also be understood as a kind of liminal experience in which structures held to be rigidly fixed are felt as dissolved or broken down. Victor Turner describes those who undergo the experience of liminality as

[35]When Tom Driver speaks of performance as involving both "physical and mental, actual and imaginary," he, I believe, missing the integrity of both worlds and of their coexistence. Driver, *Magic*, 81.

[36]Richard Schechner, *The Future of Ritual* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 39.

[37]It is fascinating to me how the English words in the quotation marks underline the discussion.

25

"pass[ing] through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state."[38] Although Turner's discussion of liminality is primarily directed towards ritual and especially to rites of passage, he points to what I am describing as the disorienting quality of the ontological complexity of any performance when he says, ". . . the most characteristic midliminal symbolism is that of paradox, or being *both* this *and* that."[39]

Whether what happens in the confrontation with the complex reality of a performance is described as a state of imbalance or of liminality, it is clear that it can be disorienting precisely because alternatives are presented as "here" and "now," and the existence of these alternatives can call into question the permanence and absolute-ness of the present state. In the case of radical performance, which by its nature intends to challenge and re-envision present reality, the ontological complexity of performance can clearly be a powerful tool. We can see this in the play about the couple threatened with the loss of their land: the dramatic reality embodies a situation in which Dalit solidarity breaks down the expected, the normal, the predictable, and introduces a "what if?" whose power will remain long after the play is over.

Performance as Nondiscursive Communication

---

[38]Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 249.

[39]Victor Turner, "Variations on a Theme of Liminality," in *Secular Ritual* ed. Sally F. Moore and Barbara Meyerhoff (Assen/Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1977), 37.

We have looked at the ontological complexity which is an essential and powerful feature of performance. But there can be no layering of realities—no real embodying of alternatives—unless performers and audience are in communication with one another. A performance is a communication event. As we noted above, this communication involves self-aware performers, an audience, and a shared web of symbols, meanings, and conventions evoked by the complex processual embodiment which involves actors, movements, sounds and music, colors and shapes, rhythm and pace. It is the embodiment and the sharing of meanings which are crucial, and while this may involve words—dialogue or narration or lyrics—the words are only one facet of the whole performance. In other words, what is communicated between performers and audience within a performance is *essentially nondiscursive communication.* By this I mean that what is communicated cannot be wholly captured and expressed in concepts and true/false propositions, but must be to a large extent appropriated and understood through the body and the heart, sensuously, kinetically, and emotionally. The fact that performance is embodied, physical, means that it communicates through impact on the bodies of the audience (and performers) in the forms of emotions and sensations.

In this section, I will look at three important dimensions of performance as nondiscursive communication: 1. the layering of dramatic on ordinary space and time resulting in the re-forming or "warping" of space-time for both the performers and the audience; 2. the existence of the "through-line," an interior dynamism which gives a felt unity to the performance as it moves from beginning to end, and 3. the use of symbols.

27

Through each of these, meanings are communicated to and through the body, arousing emotions as well as evoking images and ideas. In order to make the discussion more concrete, I will look briefly at how each is exemplified in Mungai's play, *The Newborn*.

Performance Space and Time

The layering of dramatic upon quotidian space and time begins as soon as the performers arrive in the village. The performers, all dressed in red, begin playing hand drums and sing and dance their way, with more and more villagers accompanying them, to where they will do the play. During the procession they call the audience directly into their space (which is of course a moving space and therefore involves a different time with its own rhythm and pace) with their song:

> "Come with your beautiful eyes,
> Come with your attentive ears. . . ."

Like the Dalit play discussed above, the performance takes place in a more or less circular playing area defined by the actors. In this performance, though, the actors who are not performing the play stand or sit next to and among audience members rather than forming a circle between the playing area and the gathered audience as in the Dalit play. This apparently slight difference is actually quite significant in that the point of *The Newborn* is to rouse the villagers to actively confront the issue of female infanticide. The performance space created by the actors standing *with* the audience facing the play's action is a dramatic space which the actors can easily provoke the audience with questions and from which audience members themselves can question the dramatic action

28

and even intervene in it.

The rhythm and tempo of the play is made explicit by the accompaniment of drums. The play begins with two quick scenes of women holding babies. One newborn is a boy ("Hurray! Congratulations!," the actors on the sidelines call out), the other a girl ("Oh, too bad, what a misfortune!"). Then the action slows so the audience can focus in on an argument between a pregnant wife and her husband about whether to have a sex determination test. Slowing down the tempo allows the actors in the scene time to draw the audience more fully into the acted-out decision-making and the actors on the sidelines to evoke and call out questions and comments from audience members.

In this example, we can begin to see how the multilayering of a new and different space and time on ordinary space and time functions in the communication event which is the performance. The festive procession of the actors to the playing space is like a magnet, drawing the villagers in so that they may *become an audience.* Once at the playing area, the division of the actors into those performing the scenes and those standing among the crowd creates a space in which the dramatic action will permeate normal space and time, rather than substitute for it—the actors and audience will challenge each other about what is happening in the scenes.

There is another dimension to the space in this performance. Mungai targeted this play especially to those villages where female infanticide is known to be relatively common. This means that the location of the performance was not neutral, but had a significance which contributed to the web of meanings communicated in the

performance.

In this description of *The Newborn* we can discern several characteristics of how performance space and time function to communicate in a performance. First, dramatic space and time are bounded—the performance begins and ends, and occurs here and not there. This helps account for the felt intensity of a performance event. The Indian theologian Raimon Pannikkar has vividly characterized ritual space in a way which is applicable to all performance space and which aptly captures this character of intensity. For Pannikkar, performance space is *akaḥsah*, a Sanskrit term which comes "from *a* and *kasate*, to appear, shine, be brilliant. *Akahsah* would then be that which allows things to appear, to be known, and ultimately to be. *Akahsah* is that which makes possible that things reveal themselves. It is the 'place' of revelation . . . ."[40] Since space and time are intimately interwoven in performance, we can extend this description to time, as well, and say that in both the space and time of performance, "things reveal themselves."

This characteristic has a particular potency with respect to Indian street theatre and radical performance in general. Among those things which are revealed in the performance space and time are alternatives to the societal structures that exist in the here and now. In radical performance, "what-is not-yet" comes to be and for the duration of the performance coexists with "what is." The present performance space and time contains

---

[40]Raimon Pannikkar, "There is No Outer Without Inner Space," in *Concepts of Space Ancient and Modern* ed. Kapila Vatsyayan (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1991), 22.

the past and future within it. The "not-yet" is not only hoped-for and imagined, but embodied, revealed in the *akahsah* of performance.

Second, performance space and time are all at once "inner" and "outer," "internal" and "external."[41] In *The Newborn*, the space where the performance occurs is physical space in which objects are related at certain distances from each other *and* a space filled with emotions, meanings (including that this village is a place where the murders of female babies takes place), memories, and questionings. Analogously, the performance lasts for a particular duration of time, but it *also* speeds up, slows down, agitates, calms.

The space and time of performance can be aptly described with a metaphor drawn from physics: performance space and time are not tidy Newtonian grids and flows in which identical elements are simply located and interacting externally with one another, but rather an Einsteinian space-time continuum which warps to conform to a mass of sounds, sights, intentions, emotions, meanings, memories, and hopes. It is this "warped" performance space-time which forms the communication which occurs in a performance. And much of this *cannot be spoken*, at least not in concepts, propositions, and arguments. The almost involuntary focussing of the senses on one part of the space, the framing and shaping of the physical space-time, the heightened sense of something being revealed or manifested, the complex of relationships among performers and audience within the space-time, the emotions evoked, the memories and significances brought into play—all

---

[41]Ibid.

of these are below and beyond discourse, and are essential to the very nature of performance.

The Through-Line

Performance is processual—it unrolls, unravels, in and through time, and it has an interior dynamic unity which I will call, borrowing a term from Konstantin Stanislavski, its "through-line." Each segment or scene of the performance, besides having its own content and rhythm, plays its part in this dynamic whole. The through-line carries with it a host of moods, memories, and meanings for both performer and audience, and it is this (mostly) noncognitive "stuff" which swells or contracts, quickens or slows the action, and bears us on to an ending which not only terminates the clock-time duration of the performance, but brings the through-line to a close which is apprehended as such by both performers and audience. The through-line is difficult to define, but it can be described metaphorically in a variety of ways: as, for example, a thread which holds the elements of the performance together, or as an "internal logic" or directed "flow" beneath the overt action.

How can we describe the through-line, the dynamic unity in *The Newborn*? Briefly, we could say that it is the progressive shattering of the audience's unquestioned acceptance of beliefs about female infanticide—and even more basically, about the worth of women. It begins with the procession to the performing space, continues through Mungai's (a woman's) introduction of her troupe to the villagers, moves into staccato birth

32

scenes broken into with questions and challenges from the audience, on to the close-up extended decision-making of the wife and husband, and culminates with the startling shift of the action from the actors to the audience in an open discussion of the issue and the departure of the performers.

It is evident here how the aspect of performance which I am calling the through-line slips through attempts to capture it in words and concepts. It is very much like trying to describe the dynamic unity of a piece of music. In describing the "through-line" of a musical composition, I can point to certain structural features—motifs, changes in tempi and rhythms, key changes, shifts in instrumentation, variations on melodic themes—but while such a discussion may illuminate and sensitize the listener as to what is going on, it does not capture fully in words what is apprehended sensuously, viscerally. Similarly, the through-line of the kinds of performances we are discussing does not yield to expression in concepts; rather it is ultimately a processual unity which communicates primarily to the body and the heart, rather than the mind.

Symbols in Performance

We have spoken earlier about performance as necessarily—in order to be a communication event at all—occurring within a web of symbols and conventions shared by performers and observers. It is also necessary to recognize that symbols play a crucial role *within* performances. In any performance, some of the available symbols in a society are brought together, creatively "thrown together" (sym-bolein), to become the *material*

of the performance. This use of symbols constitutes a third important way in which performances communicate nondiscursively, below or beyond the level of propositions or arguments.

In *The Newborn,* the symbols are spare but potent: newborn baby and the gesture of cradling a baby; boy, girl; woman, man; mother, father. All of these are culturally and psychically loaded. They all evoke strong feelings, memories, anxieties, hopes, feelings of "rightness" or "wrongness" based on cultural constructions of gender and valuations of the worth of each gender. Herein lies the potency of the symbolic dimension of performance: a cloud of emotional, imagistic, and cognitive meanings is called forth by certain objects, gestures, characters.

What is a symbol? A symbol is distinct from other signs in that the latter simply acts as an indicator. It points to something else different in nature from itself and has significance solely by virtue of that pointing. For example, a low mercury level on a thermometer indicates a particular measure of coolness. That is pretty much all it means—we glance at the thermometer to see how cold it is outside or whether a child has a fever, but we're not interested in the thermometer itself, just what it points to. As Avery Dulles says, "indicative signs lack intrinsic interest. We interpret them as mere observers, without being deeply moved by the signs themselves."[42] While symbols are physical, perceptible objects or actions, they also function as "clues" which "draw attention to

_____

[42]Avery Dulles, S.J., *Models of Revelation* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1985), 132.

34

themselves."[43] When the actress playing the mother in *The Newborn* mimes holding a girl baby in her arms, the members of the audience do not look beyond the baby to something different she in some sense points to but rather becomes aware of a multiplicity of emotions, memories, images, and ideas— what "female" means to men and to women, memories of murdered babies, fears that dowries will push them deeper into poverty, and on and on.

As the audience focusses on the embodied symbol, the range of meanings it carries comes into play and becomes, in a sense, part of the performance. By "meanings" I do not mean primarily cognitive meanings, but even more importantly the emotions evoked by the symbols. Symbols have emotional weight or tone. As the theologian and liturgist Urban T. Holmes puts it, symbols "always engage us first as feeling."[44]

For Dulles, the relationship of a symbol to its meanings defines what a symbol is: "a sign pregnant with a plenitude of meaning which is evoked rather than explicitly stated."[45] As Dulles' definition implies, symbols are essentially *multivalent,* carrying an indefinite range of meanings, all of which are "true" or "appropriate." Holmes aptly remarks that each symbol "represents a 'fan' of denotations and connotations . . . ."[46]

The other face of multivalency is *ambiguity*. Symbols are never able to be fully

---

[43]Ibid.

[44]Urban T. Holmes, "Liminality and Liturgy," Worship 47 (Aug.-Sept 1973), 390.

[45]Dulles, 132.

[46]Holmes, 390.

pinned down and for this reason are obscure, mysterious, alluring, and dangerous. The most profound symbols are a bit like Alice in Wonderland's rabbit hole—it seems that one can fall down into their depths forever. The Indian artist and theologian Jyoti Sahi powerfully expresses this double aspect of multivalency and ambiguity when he writes, "The symbol has the power to create in the mind a sense of wonder. This term 'wonder' has two aspects. On the one hand, it is a questioning: 'I wonder what this means?' On the other hand, it is awe and reverence. The very questionableness of life is evoked by the symbol."[47] *The Newborn* plays on this ambiguity most profoundly with the symbol of the baby—it seems to evoke in the audience a range of complicated and contradictory emotions among which are anticipation, joy, protectiveness, anxiety, anger, and a host of nameless others shades of feelings—all coexisting and all called forth by the power of the symbol.

Their physicality, emotional weight, multivalency, and ambiguity provide the conditions for another characteristic of symbols—they act upon us and lure us into them. As Dulles describes it: "We attend to [the symbols], and if we surrender to their power they carry us away . . . to enter the world of meaning opened up by the symbol we must give ourselves; we must be not detached observers but engaged participants."[48] In *The Newborn*, the members of the audience are lured into the symbols of mother and baby,

---

[47]Sahi, *Child,* 89.

[48]Ibid., 133-4.

man and woman, mother and father, and then, once they have become "engaged participants" in Dulles' sense, the play pushes them farther into engagement by challenging them to grapple directly with the issue of female infanticide. The multivalent, ambiguous, emotionally powerful symbols propel them into argument, opening them to confront one another with the question, "what are we doing?"

****

In this section we have examined three ways in which the communication which goes on in performance between and among performers and audience is nondiscursive. We first looked at how the multilayering of a new and different space and time on ordinary space and time forms the communication event, conjoining "what is not" with "what is" in a space-time field teeming with meanings and possibilities. Then we saw how both performers and audience are carried through the performance by a dynamic unity, the through-line, which is played out in time and apprehended primarily by the body and the heart. And finally, we observed how symbols evoke an indefinite multiplicity of emotional, imagistic, and cognitive meanings, and in doing so draw us out of observation into participation. All of these work together in a performance to create an event in which a profound communication occurs which cannot be fully expressed in concepts or propositions, but which can transform the participants at levels below and beyond the cognitive.

How are Performances Effective?

In the simplest, most naive sense, we can say that a performance is effective if it produces a change. Defined so broadly, however, the concept of effectiveness is useless, since insofar as performance occurs at all, some changes must take place in the physical space where it happens and in the performers and observers. The performers exert an effort and the observers are moved to pleasure, or boredom, or dislike. How then can we tighten the notion of efficacy so that it will help us understand how performances can make significant changes in their participants?

Richard Schechner has identified an "efficacy-entertainment braid" which twines through all performances ranging from what he calls "aesthetic theatre"—performances which are intended purely for entertainment—to ritual, which is, by its nature, effective. For Schechner, performances can be characterized on the basis of the relative weight of efficacy and entertainment. In morality plays, church services, court ceremonies, psycho-drama, and radical performance, the efficacy strand is predominant, in contrast to popular entertainments, bards and minstrels, circuses, fairs, and commercial theatre.[56]

Schechner speaks of entertainment-efficacy as entwined in a "braid" rather than separated as poles, because "ritual [the paradigm for Schechner of efficacious performance] and entertainment have always coexisted comfortably."[57] But how does Schechner draw the distinction between entertainment and efficacy, if some feelings of

---

[56]Schechner, *Performative Circumstances,* 149.

[57]Ibid.

38

pleasure, joy, boredom, anger, etc. are inevitable "effects" of performance? For Schechner, the efficacy of a performance which is distinct from entertainment lies in a *congruence between the content of the performance and the sort of change it produces*; in Schechner's words, "The performance effects what it celebrates."[58]

Schechner is here identifying two important elements in the notion of the efficacy of performances: a. an efficacious performance produces more than an emotional change in the observers, and b. the change is related in some way to the content of the performance. By the content, I mean not only specific narratives, characters, and symbols that are enacted and invoked, but also the nature of the performance space, the rhythm and pacing, and the relationships among performers and between performers and observers. In the language developed in the last section of this paper, a performance is efficacious to the extent that it produces transformations in the participants and these transformations are in directions delimited by the space-time of the performance, the through-line and the symbolic content.[59]

In the Dalit village performance described above, for example, I believe it is fair to say that the performers were transformed by embodying the characters of the landowner, the foreman, and the Dalits who acted in solidarity with the couple being

---

[58]Ibid., 136.

[59]It is important to note that nothing in the notion of effective performance implies that the resulting transformations are necessarily emancipatory or "good" in any other sense. "Effective" performance is a morally neutral concept.

39

threatened with the loss of their land. And at the same time, members of the audience were transformed by their encounter with the possibility made real in performance, the "not-yet," of cooperative action.[60] It is important to note that in order for it to be effective the transformations produced by a performance need not be (and probably will not be) massive. An actress in *The Newborn* remarked about the play that "if we can shake their beliefs, that is enough. It is like making ripples on the water."[61]

In Indian street theatre and other radical performances, it is possible to identify three kinds of efficacy: *revelatory, constitutive,* and *operational.* I will briefly discuss each of these.

Revelatory Efficacy

In this kind of efficacy the participants in the performance encounter an alternative mode of being or acting which is superior to current, everyday modes of being or acting. This encounter leads to an experience of tension between what is and what could be. For example, in another play performed by the REDS troupe in Dalit villages, the performers enact a situation in which field workers accost a landlord and demand a

---

[60]The significance of this kind of transformation in the Dalit community cannot be overdrawn. In a report analyzing the impact of the REDS organization (see above, 6) during the period from 1984 to 1994, it is pointed out that when REDS began "the predominant base level position was one of fatalism. The conditions of exploitation related to Dalits were perceived as God's will." Mohanraj, *A Decade with People* (Tumkur: REDS, 1995), 35.

[61]Mungai, *The Newborn,* video.

fair wage from the him, an act which is dangerous because of the marginal economic situations of agricultural workers resulting in their need to have continuous work, the difficulty of accessing legal help, and the overwhelming power of the landlords in rural areas.

This performance exemplifies revelatory efficacy on several levels. First, the audience is able to see actions and hear words which embodies an alternative way of responding to landlords' oppression. Second, the fact that the performers are themselves Dalits acting the roles both of landlord and field workers is itself a "revelation" that these sorts of actions can be done by people like themselves.

In terms of the discussion of performance earlier in this chapter, it is evident that the power for change of a performance with revelatory efficacy is made possible because of the ontological complexity of performance. I have argued that a performance event determines a new spatio-temporal reality and embodies new relationships and ways of acting, and that in performance these coexist with the ordinary, everyday space and time, relationships, and ways of acting. In this coexistence, a new, composite reality is formed. Given this, I would argue that the power for change comes from the fact that the alternatives, held in tension with the ordinary within the ontological complexity of the performance, are *really present* to both performers and observers for the duration of the performance. They are existentially encountered in the present. The tension lying in the discrepancy between what is and what-is-not-yet evokes emotions of longing and hope for change and a deeper antipathy to the present reality which has now been seen to be

contingent.

Constitutive Efficacy

Indian street theatre performances and other radical performances may also have *constitutive efficacy*. By this I mean that performances may change the way the audience feels, thinks, and speaks about itself—the way it identifies itself. The Dalit village performances I described above is a clear example. They were framed from the point of view of the Dalits as an oppressed social group with a common heritage and common struggles. The performances shifted identity from individual families, sub-groups, or villages to a pan-national group of people united by being Dalits. In doing so, they strengthened the polarization of Dalits over against caste people, government officials, and others in power. Insofar, then, as a performance is constitutively effective with respect to identity, the audience will leave the performance with a more defined sense of who they are as members of a boundaried social group, and correlative with that, a more sharply delineated sense of who is "other," "not-us"of actions and relationships and these new understandings may then come to be applied to actions and relationships in the world outside the performance.

Operational Efficacy

Operational efficacy leads the audience members to make changes in the world outside the performance. Indian street theatre, like other radical performance, is concerned primarily to impel changes in power relationships and in the understanding of

"right behavior."

Power relationships. The definition of radical performance which I am using in this paper, i.e., performances that confront and re-envision ingrained social arrangements of power, places issues of power firmly at the center of attention. As radical performance, Indian street theatre by its very nature seeks to move the observer into an oppositional relationship to existing power structures. The observer is intended to move from acceptance or ignorance of those structures to a posture of active opposition or perhaps to a weaker form of non-participation. At any rate, the intent of the performance is at the very least to disorient and make problematic the audience's relationships to the power structures that exist, *after* they leave the performance. To quote again the actress in Mungai's "Voicing Silence" troupe, one part of the efficacy of radical performance is to "make ripples in the water," ripples which keep expanding beyond the duration of the performance.

"Right behavior." The liturgical theologian Theodore W. Jennings has proposed that rituals help establish the criteria for what counts as "right behavior" outside the ritual setting. "The performance of ritual," he says, ". . . teaches one not only how to conduct the ritual itself, but how to conduct oneself outside the ritual space."[62] But do radical performances have this kind of operational efficacy? Do they lead to a change in what is approved of and striven for as "right behavior." Looking once again at the Dalit

---

[62]Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., "On Ritual Knowledge" (Journal of Religion 62 (2): 324-334), 329.

performance about the field workers and the landlord mentioned above, the act of the

workers in standing up to the landlord and demanding a fair wage does, I think, become a

model of their future actions in actual situations with their landlords. This is not to be

simplistic and say that actions will change—the dangers of losing their jobs or being

punished with violence are very real. Yet through the ontological complexity of the

performance, this kind of response has taken on a reality it may not have had before, and

it may help lead to discerning and then creating conditions which would make that

response possible.

Another way in which a performance can be effective toward "right action" in the

world lies in what happens to the body of the performer as he/she performs. In the Dalit

performances, the actors who played the landlords or other dominant characters took on

the stance and vocal mannerisms of those sorts of people as seen through the eyes of

those they oppress. More significantly, perhaps, the actors who played those Dalits who

resisted the landlord's injustices also had to find a new way of holding themselves,

moving, and speaking. In doing so, they were "rehearsing liberation." Michael Ross and

Mamunur Rashid, who have been active in radical theatre movements in Asia and Africa

have observed that in the "experience of participation, interaction, and self-

expression....the people overcome their fears and develop a sense of their own identity,

self-confidence, and class-consciousness (thus showing that people can 'act,' can change

things both on stage and in real life)."[63]

****

In this section, we have looked at the notion of "efficacious performance." We have seen that a performance is efficacious to the extent that it produces transformations in the participants in directions delimited by the space-time of the performance, the through-line and the symbolic content. We have identified three major kinds of ways in which performances are effective—revelatory efficacy, in which the audience encounters embodied alternatives to existing social structures; constitutive efficacy, in which participants in the performance come to a new sense of identity; and operational efficacy, in which people are moved to transform power structures and redefine what it means to act rightly in the world outside the performance event. In these ways Indian street theatre and other radical performances transform performers and members of the audience and move them towards transformation of the world beyond the performance. But what is the goal of this transformative work? In the final section of this chapter I will attempt to define in what sense an *effective* performance may be identified as *emancipatory*.

Emancipatory Performance

Jan Cohen-Cruz points out that radical performances, defined as performances which "question or re-envision ingrained social arrangements of power," must include

---

[63]Ross Kidd and Mamunur Rashid, 62.

Third Reich rallies and Ku Klux Klan marches.[64] These performance events possess revelatory efficacy in that they enact a spectacle of white power to observers. They are constitutively effective in forming an identity over against others, in challenging existing power structures, and in forming the bodies of the participants in stances of challenge, dominance, and hostility. Further, those performing them may well describe what they are doing using the language of emancipation. A young while male spectator of a Ku Klux Klan rally might say something like: "We whites have got to take what's rightly ours." Much of the rhetoric in rallies of the Third Reich promised "emancipation" for Aryans from the power and control of Jews and others. The originators and supporters of Third Reich and Ku Klux Klan performances, then, could very well use the language of emancipation and to advocate freedom from invidious (to them) power structures. Is there a definition of "emancipatory performance" which will exclude such performances while including the Indian street theatre performances we have been considering?

I want to suggest that "emancipatory performances" may be defined as performances which lead to deeper and fuller humanity for some, without compromising the essential humanity of others. This definition derives from the work of Paolo Freire who speaks of "humanization" as "man's vocation . . . thwarted by injustice, exploitation, oppression, and the violence of the oppressors; . . . affirmed by the yearning of the

---

[64]Cohen-Cruz, 2.

46

oppressed for freedom and justice, and by their struggle to recover their lost humanity."[65]
A similar account of the meaning of emancipation/liberation is found in the work of some
Christian liberation theologians, especially those from Asia who are working in a
predominately nonChristian context. The Taiwanese theologian C.S. Song, for example,
has given a description of the task which he understands as the *missio Dei,* a divine call
not only to Christians but to all people concerned with justice and right relationship, in
terms of fully humanity: "What is at stake is the question of how human beings can
remain human. It is also a question of how their frightened, tired and withered bodies,
minds and hearts can rise from resignation to determination, from despair to hope, and
from death to life . . . ."[66] The goal, continues Song, is "a human community in which the
forces of love, justice and peace may prevail over the powers of hate, oppression and
inhumanity."[67] The Indian Jesuit theologian Samuel Kappen defines the kingdom of God
as "on the one hand, the liberation of man from every alienation, i.e., from everything that
renders him other than what he ought to be, and on the other, the full flowering of the
human on our planet. In other words, it is not only freedom *from,* but also freedom
for—freedom for creativity, community, and love."[68]

_____

[65]Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1986), 28.

[66]C.S. Song, "An Asian View of Mission" in *Christian Mission, Jewish Mission,* ed.
Martin A. Cohen and Helga Croner (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 185.

[67]Ibid., 185.

[68]Sebastian Kappen, *Jesus and Freedom* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1977), 56.

The second part of the definition of 'emancipatory' offered above—"without compromising the essential humanity of others"— is crucial to exclude the instances of the paradigmatic *non*-emancipatory performances cited above—of the Ku Klux Klan and the Third Reich. Freire makes this point as well: "In order for this struggle to have meaning, the oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity . . . , become in turn oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restorers of the humanity of both."[69]

What, though, is meant by the idea of "humanity" and "humanization"? It will be assumed here that it ranges over all of the conditions of human life, including a. *basic survival needs*—food, safe water, shelter, land, freedom from violence; b. a sense of *identity* both as belonging to a community and as an individual; c. *knowledge* of what is real, including knowledge of social conditions and prevailing power dynamics; d. a sense of *agency,*of being empowered to act and make changes in the world, and e. a relationship with a *transcendent presence or ideal* which is beyond the here-and-now, not "owned" by the present moment. Different radical performances may emphasize one or another of these levels of being human. The Dalit performances we have been looking at explicitly include the first two and the fourth, the sense of agency (although in a sense they at least imply the third and sixth).

A final point must be made. Every emancipatory performance is emancipatory *for* some people *from* some state of affairs which has been in some way disempowering and

---

[69]Freire, 28.

dehumanizing for them. Expressed in this way, it may appear that an emancipatory performance may only be *for* the oppressed members of a given society *from* their oppression by a dominant group. In the example of the Dalit performances, the intent was to enable the observers: first, to begin to understand how their specific conditions result from interwoven religious, class, and economic structures; second, to identify themselves explicitly as Dalits with pride and a sense of unity, and third, to envision ways of meliorating their situation.

On the other hand, some emancipatory performances are primarily directed to members of dominant groups who are dehumanized by failing to acknowledge their interrelationships with others. A good example of this occurred in a radical performance in Belgrade in April, 1993, the first anniversary of the beginning of the war in Bosnia. Demonstrators gathered on the main street in Belgrade. Covering themselves with a piece of black fabric which spanned the entire length of the street, they become a living "ribbon of mourning."[70] This performance was directed primarily to the dominant group of Serbian politicians and the citizens who supported the war. The intent was to witness to the fact of death in Bosnia and to manifest resistance—to force the fact of dying soldiers and civilians upon those who chose not to see and to bring awareness of the consequences of the war to those who glorified it. This was an example of emancipatory performance addressed to the dominant in an attempt to deepen their humanity by confronting them

---

[70]Knezevic, "Women in Black," *Radical Street Performance,* 58-9.

with knowledge which they would want to resist and evoking an emotional response of sorrow and anger through the manipulation of the a traditional symbol of mourning, the black ribbon. The performance confronted observers who were active or at least complicit by their silence to a fuller humanity in the sense of increased cognitive and emotional awareness of a present reality.

This discussion of "emancipatory performance" has led to the following conclusions: First, the nature of the transformation achieved through an emancipatory performance is to deepen or enrich the humanity of the participants without compromising the essential humanity of others. Second, the "humanization" which results ranges over the whole span of human faculties and needs, from material to spiritual. And third, an emancipatory performance may achieve its effect for members of both subordinate and dominant groups.

****

In this chapter, we have looked extensively at performance and radical performance as exemplified by Indian street theatre. We have defined ways in which a performance can be efficacious and suggested an understanding of what it means for an effective performance to be emancipatory. It is the primary thesis of this chapter that the capacity of performance to be effective and emancipatory arises out of the very nature of performance.

First, performance is an embodied, processual event in which communication takes place below and beyond the cognitive level through the "warping" of space and

50

time, the dynamic unity or through-line, and the use of symbols. The physicality of performance and its capacity for nondiscursive communication allow it to be effective. It is face-to-face, body-to-body communication and it is because of these powerful qualities of immediacy and presence—of touch, movement, interaction; of being drawn into the symbols, carried by the flow, present in the rich warping of space and time—that transformations of emotions, beliefs, bodies, relationships may occur.

Second, performance creates a situation of ontological complexity, a kind of reality in which the ordinary space and time world within which the performance is played coexists with a different world, a not-here and not-now which yet *is* here and now. This has two crucial implications for the capacity of performance to be effective and emancipatory. First, the world created or invoked by the performance actually embodies alternatives to the factual world. It exists—it can be felt, looked at, heard, entered into physically or empathetically. In performances, alternative realities come to life.[71]

Second, the ontological complexity of performance provides the conditions for looseness, slippage, risk, imbalance relative to what is accepted as given in ordinary, unexamined existence. To shift the images a bit, Turner's analysis of liminality involves the notion of "anti-structure," of breaking down the normal structures of life. He describes the liminal state in a variety of metaphors: threshold, corridor, tunnel, pilgrim's road, all

---

[71]It should be made clear that these enacted alternatives do not have to have either full-fledged plots or pose clear-cut options. Even the suggestion of an alternative becomes integrated into this new reality.

of which express the sense of going away from the normal, crossing over, leaving behind.[72] Because they create conditions under which participants (including observers) can slip out of or turn away from the accepted conditions of life, performances can effect transformation.

Indian street theatre, using these intrinsic characteristics of performance, aims at transformation in the direction of emancipation. It opposes prevailing social structures while embodying an alternative which opens a fuller human life; it is powerfully driven by anger and yearning, suffering and hope, memory and vision. In addition, it goes where the people are. It is performed *for* and sometimes *by* the people (the *janam*, the masses, the oppressed), most usually in the places where suffering and oppression go on, although sometimes in the sites of power. Street theatre is a pilgrim theatre, always on the road, travelling wherever the power of performance can be used for emancipation.

---

[72]Victor Turner, "Variations," 37.

CHAPTER 2

EUCHARISTIC RITUAL AS EMANCIPATORY RITUAL PERFORMANCE

The ritual of Eucharist lies at the heart of Christian liturgical practice. This is

certainly so for the Episcopal Church. According to the Episcopal Outline of Faith, or

Catechism, it is one of the "two great sacraments given by Christ to his Church"[73] And

since the issuing of the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*, the Eucharist has been considered

"the principle act of Christian worship on the Lord's Day and other major Feasts" (BCP,

13).

---

[73]*The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979), 858. All further
references will be cited in the text.

The Eucharistic ritual is presumed to be effective, to cause transformation in its participants. In Article XXV of the Anglican Articles of Religion, this is made quite clear: "Sacraments . . .[are] certain sure witnesses, and effectual signs of grace, and God's good will towards us, by the which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our Faith in him" (BCP, 872). The 1979 Catechism spells out the fruits of God's work, the "benefits" of the Eucharist, as "the forgiveness of our sins, the strengthening of our union with Christ and one another, and the foretaste of the heavenly banquet which is our nourishment in eternal life" (BCP, 860).

It is not my concern here to deal with the theological questions underlying these assertions about the efficacy of the Eucharistic ritual. My concern is with sacramental rituals as performances, as communication events involving God and the worshipping community. I want to question to what extent the *way* in which the ritual is performed effectively communicates God's salvific action to the community gathered in worship. I believe that God's action may be mediated and communicated more or less effectively by different ways of performing the Eucharist.

In addressing these questions, I want to hold up Indian street theatre as a paradigm of effective performance which aims towards emancipation. I hope that doing so may provide a fresh, even a "radical" vision, of how Eucharistic ritual can mediate and communicate the transformation of the participants and their relationships to each other and to the world outside the ritual.

Ritual as Performance

In understanding ritual to be a kind of performance, I am following the lead of anthropologist Victor Turner and others who have contributed to a remarkable body of work in ritual studies since the middle of this century. We will be looking in this section at the characteristics rituals share with all performances, as well as the ways they constitute a distinctive group of performances. In structuring this discussion I will be following more or less the order in which I explicated the notion of performance in Chapter 1.

1. *Ritual is a complex, embodied action in space and time.* Turner describes ritual as "essentially *performance, enactment,*"[74] which involves, "at least in simpler societies . . . an orchestration of symbolic actions and objects in all the sensory codes—visual, auditory, kinesthetic, olfactory, gustatory—full of music and dancing and with interludes of play and entertainment."[75] This rich intermingling of bodies, movements, space, colors, pace and rhythm is, as we saw in Chapter 1, one mark of performance in general.[76]

2. *Ritual, like all other performances, is a communication event*, although the ways that this "plays out" differ from other kinds of performance in certain respects.

    a. In many kinds of performance, like Indian street theatre, some of the

---

[74]Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre,* 79.

[75]Ibid.

[76]See above, 14.

participants in the performance event are performers while others are audience. Communication goes on between and among them, but their roles in the performance situation are distinct. In ritual, on the other hand, the performer-audience relationship is either absent or minimal; rather, all are participants. Turner describes ritual as having a "congregation" with leaders and non-leaders, who "all share formally and substantively the same set of beliefs and accept the same system of practices, the same sets of rituals or liturgical actions."[77] In addition, the participants in a ritual carry out their roles deliberately, not in pure Sspontaneous behavior but "self-consciously 'acted' like a part in a play."[78]

It is important to make the additional point that in religious rituals the divine—God or the gods—is treated as a participant. Christopher Irvine puts this explicitly in the language of performance when he says about the Eucharist, "God is the principle, albeit hidden actor in the ritual performance."[79]

b. *Ritual, like other performances, occurs within a particular system of symbols, meanings, and conventions, shared by the participants.* For Turner, ritual is "prescribed formal behavior,"[80] assuming and expressing a system of symbols and conventions, and

[77]Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre,* 109.

[78]Sally F. Moore and Barbara Myerhoff, "Secular Ritual: Forms and Meanings" in *Secular Ritual,* 7.

[79]Christopher Irvine, "Celebrating the Eucharist: A Rite Performance," *Theology* 97 (July-Aug. 1994) : 263.

[80]Ibid.

performed self-consciously (i.e., according to rules or rubrics). David I. Kertzer, who

extends the notion of ritual beyond explicitly religious situations into the secular realm,

defines ritual as "symbolic behavior that is socially standardized and repetitive."[81] In

ritual, participants are caught up in the ritual action through their participation in the "web

of symbolism"[82] which surrounds it. It is also a web of communication in which

participants

can be changed: "ritual works through the senses to structure our sense of reality and our

understanding of the world around us."[83]

     With respect to conventions, meanings, and symbols, however, rituals differ from

other performances in the degree of *gravity or weight* they carry within a particular social

world. It is important to participate in the rituals and to participate "properly," i.e., be the

people warranted to perform the ritual or its parts, do the right actions and say the right

words in the right order, wear the proper garments, etc. Turner notes that the stakes are

often high for those in the society who choose *not* to participate—unlike most

performances, in which non-attendance is merely a simple act of preferring some other

activity, "in ritual, stay-away means rejecting the congregation—or being rejected by it, as

---

[81]David I. Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988),   9.

[82]Ibid.

[83]Ibid., 10.

in excommunication, ostracism, or exile."[84]

There are various ways of understanding the social weight of ritual. Some theorists understand it noetically, in terms of knowledge or belief. Kertzer, for example, asserts that "Through ritual, beliefs about the universe come to be acquired, reinforced, and eventually changed."[85] For Émile Durkheim, a founder of ritual studies, what is important about rituals is "that they provide a powerful way in which people's social dependence can be expressed."[86]

c. *As performances, rituals are often repeated over and over at appointed times and places, and include repetitive words and gestures.* These two characteristics of ritual performances are, I suspect, related to the weight, the solemnity, they bear in society. Theorists vary in the stress they put on repetitiveness in either sense as essential to ritual. The Eastern European social theorist Zdzislaw Mach expresses perhaps the most extreme rigorist view of intra-ritual repetitiveness: a ritual has a rigid formal structure which "organizes the symbolic action into a pattern where every development of events is predetermined. Ideally, ritual as repetitive action should be repeated in exactly the same form."[87] On the opposite extreme are contemporary "one-shot" rituals created for specific

---

[84]Ibid., 112.

[85]Kertzer, 9.

[86]Cited in ibid.

[87]Zdzislaw Mach, *Symbols, Conflict, and Identity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 73.

occasions, especially from counter-cultural or semi-therapeutic perspectives.[88] I believe

that "ritual" can properly be applied across the range of repetition-spontaneity, if

performances have such weight that they are identified by the participants as rituals. I also

agree with Turner that because ritual is essentially performance enacted by individuals in

space and time, novelty can crop up even in tightly ruled and repetitive rituals: "...the

rules may 'frame' the performance, but the 'flow' of action and interaction within that

frame may conduce to hitherto unprecedented insights and even generate new symbols

and meanings, which may be incorporated into subsequent performances."[89]

****

In this section, we have looked at rituals as performances. We have noted that like

other performances they are processual enactments in space and time, they are enveloped

and shot through with symbol and convention, and they involve self-conscious

participants. We have also seen that rituals are distinctive from other performances in a

number of factors—a. there is no performer-audience distinction; rather, all are

participants although there may be a division into leaders and non-leaders; b. rituals are

accorded particular "weight" or seriousness within a social group; and c. they are usually

repeated and repetitive in form or content or both. Eucharistic rituals, our particular focus

---

[88] There are a number of guidebooks to the creation of such rituals, e.g.. There are a number of guidebooks to the creation of such rituals, e.g.. Renée Beck and Sydney Barbara Metrick, *The Art of Ritual: A Guide to Creating and Performing Your Own Rituals for Growth and Change* (Berkeley: Celestial Arts, 1990).

[89]Turner, *From Ritual,* 79.

in this chapter, certainly manifests these features of ritual performance. However, before

moving on to a close study of one particular Eucharistic ritual—Rite II from the 1979

Book of Common Prayer, I want to compare ritual with other performances with respect

to the ways it communicates nondiscursively, how it manifests ontological complexity,

and in what ways it is efficacious.

Ritual Performances as Nondiscursive Communication

In Chapter 1, we explored performance as a kind of communication which takes

place below and beyond discourse and argument. We saw that in a performance event,

participants become located in a multilayered or "warped" space and time created by the

performance; they are carried along by a through-line; and they are drawn into a

participatory encounter with symbols. How do these essential aspects of performance

manifest themselves in ritual?

Ritual Space and Time

In religious ritual, for example, the performance space is sacred space. It is in

some sense "holy," set apart from quotidian space at least for the duration of the ritual:

"An enclosure is identified physically or conceptually for the time and duration of the

event . . . . Terrestrial space is transformed to 'celestial space' and the 'microcosm'

signifies the

'macrocosm.'"[90] There may be specific reasons for identifying a particular space as sacred. It may, for example, be associated in cultural memory with a holy person or event. Or the place itself may be felt by people in a particular culture to possess a numinous quality. The Indian theorist Baidyanath Saraswati has noted that in some cultures the whole earth may be sacred, but often "some places are more sacred—effective—than others, and hence fit for ritual performance."[91] Or, alternatively, a neutral space is chosen and rendered sacred by a ritualistic action like sacrifice.[92] And of course ritual may be performed in a permanent location, a temple, mosque, church, or synagogue, in which the space is permanently formed by architecture and by the placement of ritual objects.

Ritual time is complex time, in which the flow of present time is interwoven with other kinds of durations. A clear example is the Christian liturgical year, in which the story of Christ's birth, life, death, unfolds itself over the course of the calendar year. One "layer" of performance time in the Eucharistic liturgy is the playing out of this sequence, bringing it into actuality through the Gospel readings. The ongoing (in memory as evoked by the readings) life of Jesus becomes a temporal counterpoint to both the repetitive actions of the liturgy and the particular lives of the worshippers. Within the ritual, also,

---

[90]Kapil Vatsyayan, "Performance: The Process, Manifestation, and Experience," in *Concepts of Space Ancient and Modern* ed. Kapila Vatsyayan (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1991), 381.

[91]Baidyanath Saraswati, "Ritual Space (Tribal-Nontribal Context)," in *Concepts of Space,* 357.

[92]Ibid., 360.

memories of pivotal occurrences are invoked to add meanings and emotions evoked by them to the present event. In the Baptismal ritual, for example, the celebrant offers a prayer of thanksgiving for the gift of water: "Over it the Holy Spirit moved in the beginning of creation. Through it you led the children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt into the land of promise. In it your Son Jesus received the baptism of John and was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah . . . " (BCP, 306).

Ritual space-time, then, like the space-time of other performances, is internal *and* external, physical *and* teeming with emotions, meanings, memories. It is *akahsah,* the place and time in which things come to be and are revealed.[93] In analyzing and evaluating a ritual, it is crucial to look closely at how it forms space and time as well as the content of what comes to be revealed.

The Through-line

When we looked at the through-line of *The Newborn*, we saw how difficult it is to conceptualize the through-line even of a performance based more or less directly on a on a plot or narrative. Rituals tend to have more obscure through-lines which do not get their primary coherence from a narrative. The through-line may be felt as a dynamic whole, but may be difficult to express in words at all. Different participants or observers, from within the same culture or even the same worshipping community, may give different accounts of the nature of the underlying "internal logic" or flow of the performance. Yet

---

[93]See above, 30.

there is a felt coherence experienced by both performers and observers. The dynamic

could be expressed metaphorically as like stepping into a stream and letting the water

take them. The water flows more slowly in some parts, more quickly in others, there are

eddies and there are white water rapids. The participants are carried along by a dynamic

to which they assent and yield by entering the ritual space and time.

However, in the absence of a unifying plot, it is possible for rituals to have less

than adequate through-lines. For example, the different "scenes" of the rituals may feel

disconnected and discrete, as if they were simply placed together one after another

without a unifying dynamic. We will find that the coherence of the through-line can

function as a critical principle for evaluating performances, especially ritual

performances.

Symbols in Ritual Performance

Rituals make use of symbols which have particular depth within a culture. This

close relationship between ritual and deep symbolic content is related to the social weight

borne by ritual.[94] Moreover, the symbols which lie at the heart of a religious ritual—the

---

[94]Interestingly, even newly minted rituals attempt to embody deep symbolic content
which both signifies and helps establish the weight of the performance. In Beck and Metrick's
ritual workbook, for example, Guideline #2 says, "Let the myth inspire you . . . . A ritual
admits you to sacred time and space, into the archetypal realm of myth and mystery. You
might choose to research myths and fairy tales with the same theme as the ritual you are
planning, or explore how other cultures have realized intentions similar to yours . . . . "
Beck and Metrick, 88.

water of Baptism, the lighting of the new fire at the Easter Vigil—are considered to have a privileged relationship to the divine. The Russian Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemann expresses this view when he says that in a religious symbol the empirical and the spiritual are united "epiphanically": "one reality manifests (πιφανω) and communicates the other *but*—and this is immensely important—only to the degree to which the symbol itself is a participant in the spiritual reality and is able or called upon to manifest it."[95]

In our discussion of the symbolic aspect of performance, we spoke about symbols in performances as physically realized, multivalent, ambiguous, and having the power to lure us or, in Avery Dulles' words, to "carry us away."[96] The assumption of a connection of ritual symbols with the divine or the spiritual means that in being "carried away," the ritual participant is being drawn into the realm of the divine. Understanding the symbols used in ritual as epiphanic, in some way opening a way into the divine, marks a distinguishing characteristic of ritual over against other kinds of performances, including street theatre. In the creation of the latter, symbols are "thrown together," woven together in a dynamic unity in order to effect transformation towards emancipation. The symbols

---

[95]Alexander Schmemann, *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom.* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988), 39.

[96]See above, 36.

are chosen for pragmatic reasons (and possibly for aesthetic reasons as well). We have looked, for example, at Mungai's play on female infanticide. The playwright and director Pralayan also produced a play on female infanticide, whose climactic symbolic gesture was a faithful daughter lighting her father's funeral pyre.[97] Each playwright approached the same issue with the same basic intent, and chose quite different symbolic material. In contrast, in ritual performances at least the primary symbols are given by the foundational religious stories or beliefs in a culture. Bread and wine, for example, are at the heart of the Eucharistic ritual—in a sense, particular ritual enactments of the Eucharist are constructed around them.

Symbols, since they are crucial to the way ritual performances communicate to the participants, provide a third lens (with ritual space-time and the through-line) through which to examine rituals critically. It is possible to evaluate a ritual's communicative power by determining what symbols are present and how they are being used.

****

In this section we have considered ritual performance as nondiscursive communication, experienced by the ritual's participants in the layering of sacred space and time on ordinary space and time, the dynamic unity of the through-line, and the ephiphanic character of ritual symbols. We have also come to see that ritual space and time, the through-line, and symbolic content can act as tools for critical reflection on

---

[97]Pralayan, interview by author, Chennai (Madras), India, 18 July 1998.

particular rituals, and I will use them as such in my discussion of Eucharistic rituals in the final sections of this paper.

Ritual Performance and Ontological Complexity

The discussion of the symbolic dimension of ritual performance hints at the way that the ontological complexity of rituals differs from that of other performances. In Chapter 1, I argued that a new, integral reality comes into being with the layering of dramatic space and time upon daily space and time, of assumed character upon ordinary identity, and of new patterns of relationship upon normal patterns, and that in this new reality lies much of the capacity of performance to effect change.[98]

In ritual performance, the "dramatic" space and time, characters, and patterns of relationship are apprehended by participants in the ritual as having an independent existence outside their manifestation in the ritual. I use the word 'manifestation' deliberately—what comes to coexist with ordinary space and time, identity, and relationship in a ritual already *is*, in fact usually is conceived to *be* in a highly valuative sense. For some reason this other reality is not always evident, but comes to be revealed in the complex whole of the performance.

As an example let us look briefly at the Christian rite of Baptism. Here is a dramatic space and time in which "Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness" (BCP, 302) are active and the baptismal candidates reject them and turn from them to Jesus

---

[98]See above, 24-26.

Christ, promising "to follow and obey him as your Lord" (BCP, 303). With the baptism

their sins are forgiven by God and they are "raise[d] to a new life of grace" and "marked

as Christ's own forever" (BCP 308). These are cosmic events—and yet they occur on a

normal Sunday mornings, in the local church. And the newly baptized themselves are

both their quotidian, structured selves— Robert, a red-faced six-month old, Jane who

clerks in the Walmart—*and* new members of the "household of God" (BCP, 308). The

other participants are friends, relatives, strangers—*and* sharers "in [God's] eternal

priesthood" (ibid.), who have committed themselves to a covenantal relationship with

God which involves certain ways of behaving as affirmed in the Baptismal Covenant.

The point I want to make here is that in the ontological complexity of the

Baptismal ritual for Christians the dramatic reality which coexists with daily reality for

the duration of the ritual is believed to exist independently beyond the performance. This

is true of ritual in general, and it can intensify the disorientation which is one aspect of

the liminality experience in ritual performance. Earlier I spoke of the power of the

ontological complexity of performance to render contingent and question or challenge

situations and structures which have been taken for granted in the daily world. Urban

Holmes describes this state of "anti-structure" in this way: "In a liminal existence, those

things *in the structures* that define life have been left behind. By this I mean anything

from job descriptions, signs of rank, or bureaucratic or organizational charts, to formal,

operational logic, rubrics, and canon law."[99]

In ritual, the belief in the independent, ongoing existence of the dramatic reality, has two consequences. First, this reality provides a kind of guarantee for the actions, commitments, and ways of life undertaken by participants within the ritual and beyond. In the language of the Baptismal ritual this is conveyed by a shift in grammatical mood from the subjunctive and imperative: ". . . *sanctify* this water, we pray you, by the power of your Holy Spirit, that those who here are cleansed from sin . . . *may continue* forever in the risen life of Jesus Christ . . . " (BCP, 307), to the indicative : ". . . we thank you . . . that you *have bestowed* upon these your servants the forgiveness of sin, and *have raised* them to the new life of grace" (BCP, 308). What has been performed in the ritual has been (really) done by the power of the divine.

Second, the assumption of the independent reality which is manifested in a ritual (as well as social weight of ritual) can contribute towards rituals functioning as conservative forces in society. Zdzislaw Mach believes that the symbolic structure in a ritual "confines and maintains social order by creating a model for reality," a model "not only seen and heard, but [which] acts it out, makes the image of it and thus they can live out the order which ritual postulates."[100] The freedom of creative theatre activists like Mungai and Pralayan to pose alternatives and explore new possibilities is not shared, at

---

[99]Holmes, 389.

[100]Mach, 8.

least not to the same extent, by those who work with religious rituals.

The Efficacy of Ritual Performances

In the discussion in Chapter 1, we adopted Richard Schechner's definition of the efficacy of performance as the "congruence between the content of the performance and the sort of change it produces."[101] We identified in Indian street theatre and other radical performances three modes of efficacy—*revelatory*, in which the audience encounters embodied alternatives to existing social structures; *constitutive*, in which participants in the performance come to a new sense of their identity, and *operational,* in which people are moved to transform power structures and redefine what it means to act rightly in the world outside the performance event. Rituals are effective in all of these modes.

Ritual and Revelatory Efficacy

In the last section we saw that rituals are considered by the participants in them to reveal, in a literal sense, a persistent reality independent of quotidian life. Rituals open up and embody this realm, and in doing so create a situation of anti-structure within which the "ordinary" can be judged. In the Baptismal ritual the confrontation of the divine reality with the conditions of daily life is evident in the questions asked of the questions before baptism, especially: "Do you renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God?" and "Do you renounce all sinful desires that draw you

---

[101]Schechner, *Performative Circumstances,* 136.

from the love of God?" (BCP, 302).

Taking account of Mach's observation about the tendency of ritual to conserve social values, I want to observe that the revelatory efficacy of a ritual, while always raising the possibility of judging existing social structures, may not reveal possibilities that are radically new. The divine paradigm may indeed function conservatively. On the other hand, I believe that it is possible that in a ritual performance, truly radical possibilities may be revealed. Drawing again on the example of the baptismal ritual in the 1979 Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer,* the candidates promise to "seek and serve Christ in all persons . . ." (BCP, 305), a vision of a life of service that clearly goes against the grain of the structures of domination and exclusion in the society at large.

Ritual and Constitutive Efficacy

Zdzislaw Mach has detailed the intimate link between ritual and the formation of identity. For Mach, the boundaries of group identity are created through symbolic action, and especially through ritual: "Boundaries created in the process of building a group's identity are of a symbolic nature. Historical myth . . ., ritual . . . , art . . .serve both as the content of an image of self and others, and as a symbolic substance [?] with which differences are defined and emphasized."[102] Rituals, he goes on to say, "owing to their symbolic complexity and dynamic character, . . . are particularly suitable for expressing

_____

[102]Mach, 265.

identity and intergroup relations."[103]

Mach points out that ritual serves not only to maintain and reinforce group identities over time, but also provides a way that new identities can be defined and established. In both processes, rituals, as well as other symbolic forms, "shape relations through the emotional and ideological construction of images, polarization of partners in social conflict, acting out of models of social orders, . . . and making obscure . . . differences clear and easy to perceive and understand."[104]

In the Baptismal ritual we have been looking at as a model, the newly baptized are "marked as Christ's own for ever," welcomed "into the household of God," and given a share in "[Christ's] eternal priesthood" (BCP, 308). This is a new group identity into which they have been initiated through the ritual. They are *these* people, which implies that there are *those* people who are other/different, at the very least the (unbaptized) people from whose group the new baptized have come. Although this is an initiatory rite and not repeated for the same individuals, the group identity of "baptized Christian" is brought into the foreground every time they renew the baptismal covenant, e.g., at the baptism of others or at the GreatVigil of Easter.

Operational Efficacy

The operational efficacy of rituals, like that of other performances, lies in their

---

[103]Ibid.

[104]Ibid. 269-70.

71

ability to make changes in the world outside the performance. I want to point specifically

here, in parallel to the discussion of Indian street theatre in Chapter 1, to the ways rituals

can impel changes in power relationships and in the way "right behavior" is understood.

The operational efficacy in both cases springs from the fact that in ritual relationships and

behavior are, quite literally, embodied. And the fact that ritual, in contrast to

performances like Indian street theatre in which is a distinct difference between

performers and audience, involves all as participants means that all are (to a greater or

lesser extent) actually embodying relationships and behavior, "acting" them out.

Power relationships. Ritual performances embody differential relationships. In

sacramental liturgies, for example, the priest or presider has actions, speech, and often a

particular location in the ritual space reserved for him/her. Whatever egalitarian theology

of the "priesthood of all believers" may be explicitly espoused, the rituals enact

something quite different, and these differences have to do with power.

Catherine Bell sees the enacting of power relationships as an intrinsic aspect of

what she calls 'ritualization.' "Ritualization," she says, "is a strategic play of power, of

domination and resistance, within the arena of the social body."[105] She explicates this in

terms of embodiment and enacting: "It is in ritual—. . . as the area for prescribed

sequences of repetitive movements of the body that simultaneously constitute the body,

the person, and the macro-and micronetworks of power—that we can see a fundamental

---

[105]Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 204.

strategy of power."[106] Participants in a ritual enact the structure of the ritual in their bodies

(and in their minds and emotions) and in so doing embody their relationships to each

other and to those outside the ritual. But the operational efficacy of rituals with respect to

power relationships does not derive only from "rehearsing" them in the ritual actions.

Ritual, in Mach's words, not only "creates a reality of power [and] acts it out, [but]

provides it with an aura of sacredness and traditional values."[107] But, as he points out,

rituals do not always embody and sanctify status quo power relationships. Rituals can also

be used by subordinate groups to propose and create a new social ordering: "Dissatisfied

groups which contest the social order also use symbolic structures to express their views

and to construct their political world."[108]

"Right behavior." Liturgical theologian Theodore Jennings sees the operational efficacy

of ritual in even broader terms. He believes that the function of ritual is to "pattern all

significant action,"[109] and indeed he argues that a criterion for "falsifying" a ritual is "the

extent to which it cannot serve as a paradigm for significant action outside the ritual itself

and [it] is validated to the extent to which it does function in this way."[110] He gives the

Lord's Prayer as an example. On the basis of its use in ritual, it has efficacy outside the

---

[106]Ibid.

[107]Ibid., 83.

[108]Mach, 266.

[109]Jennings, 329.

[110]Ibid.

rite by constituting a criterion of what *all* (Christian) prayer should be.[111] The Baptismal

Covenant represents another way in which extra-ritual actions can be patterned by what

happens within a ritual. The second part of the covenant is a dialogue between the

celebrant and the candidate in which the latter promises to behave in certain ways "with

God's help," to conform to a particular way of life, a mode of "right action" in the world

outside the ritual (BCP, 304-5).[112]

<p style="text-align:center">**********</p>

I have discussed three ways in which ritual performance may be efficacious:

through mediating an encounter with a persistent divine or spiritual reality which can be a

vision of a new way of being and/or a model on the basis of which the world of ordinary

experience can be judged; through confirming or establishing a group identity delimited

by the ritual, and through ritual-formed actions in the world.

The Rite II Eucharistic Liturgy as Effective Performance

Let us now apply the analysis of effective performance developed above to a

consideration of a specific Eucharistic ritual. I have chosen to focus on the Rite II liturgy

in the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer,* because as the Eucharistic ritual most commonly

---

[111]Ibid.

[112]A promise—"I will, with God's help"—is not a proposition or statement, but a
"performative" utterance, a verbal expression which accomplishes a result—a speech-act.
See J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,
1975).

used in the denomination, it forms the common experience of Eucharist for most

Episcopalians.

In our examination of the Rite II Eucharist, we will be asking how well the

liturgical performance functions as a communication event, especially at the deep levels

of communication which touch the bodies and hearts of the participants. We will look at

the multilayering of space and time which gives form to the performance, the through-line

which carries participants through it, and the web of symbols into which the performance

draws the participants. For each of these we will question to what extent they succeed in

making the liturgical performance effective and in what way: revelatory—encountering a

divine reality which re-visions and/or judges the everyday, lived world;

constitutive—confirming or establishing a group identity, or operational—impelling the

ritual's participants outward to do ritual-formed actions in the world.

As a reference point for my discussion of the liturgy, I will use an outline which I

have slightly adapted from one provided by the Episcopal liturgist, Byron D. Stuhlman.

This outline uses the titles for the sections of the liturgy as given in the text of Rite II

itself (BCP, 355-375) and in the "Order for Celebrating the Holy Eucharist" (BCP, 400-

401; these titles are in quotes).[113]

THE PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD OF GOD
"The People and Priest Gather in the Lord's Name"
Hymn, Psalm, or Anthem (optional)

---

[113]Byron D. Stuhlman, *Eucharistic Celebration 1789-1979* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1988), 137-141.

Acclamation
Collect for Purity (optional)
Gloria, song of praise, Kyrie, or Trisagion

"They Proclaim and Respond to the Word of God"
The Word of God
Salutation dialogue and collect
First lesson
Psalm, hymn, or anthem (optional)
Second lesson (optional)
Psalm, hymn, or anthem (optional)
Gospel with responses before and after
The Sermon
The Nicene Creed (on Sundays and other Major Feasts)

"They Pray for the World and the Church"
The Prayers of the People

The Confession (may be omitted on occasion)
Invitation, Confession, Absolution

"They Exchange the Peace"
The Peace

THE CELEBRATION OF THE HOLY COMMUNION
"They Prepare the Table"
Sentence of bidding (optional)
Hymn, psalm, or anthem (optional)
Collection of alms
Presentation and Placement of bread, wine, and money or other gifts

"They Make Eucharist" (Give Thanks)
The Great Thanksgiving
Salutation and "Lift up your hearts" dialogue
Preface
Sanctus/Benediction
Continuation with Institution Narrative, Memorial Acclamation, Offering,
and Epiclesis (four alternatives)
Great Amen
Lord's Prayer

"They Break the Bread"
The Breaking of the Bread
      Fraction in silence
      Pascha Nostrum and/or Agnus Dei or other anthem (optional)

"They Share the Gifts of God"
      Invitation
      Communion
      Hymns, psalms, anthems (optional)
      Postcommunion prayer (two alternatives)
      Hymn (optional)
      Blessing (optional)
      Dismissal (four forms) and response

The outline summarizes the text of the Rite II liturgy, but of course, as a ritual, the text in the *Book of Common Prayer* is not meant to be read, but to be performed, to become embodied action in space and time. We have seen that rituals, like other performances, are effective insofar as they communicate to the bodies and hearts of participants through the multilayering of space and time, the through-line, and symbolization. In this section, I will look at the Rite II Eucharist from the point of view of each of these.

Using this outline as a reference point, we shall now look at the efficacy of the Rite II Eucharist from the point of view of each of the aspects of nondiscursive communication, the through-line, performance space and time, and symbols.

Through-line

What is the through-line of the Rite II Eucharistic liturgy as a processual embodiment? What is the dynamic unity which carries the participants on from the

beginning to the end of the ritual? Although any through-line is difficult to grasp in words, I believe that a fair expression of Rite II's through-line is in terms of the formation of a new community. From the gathering of individuals from their scattered lives, to the re-scattering of them back into the world after the "Thanks be to God" response at the dismissal, the ritual takes the participants through a series of speech-acts (prayer, confession, affirmation, etc.), symbolic gestures, and actions which forms them step-by-step from a disparate aggregate of persons who come together in the ritual space to the "People of God" (BCP, 364) who eat and drink together the bread and wine which they acknowledge as the Body and Blood of Christ, and leave as "living members" of Jesus Christ (366). As participants, they perform the ritual with their bodies, voices, perceptions, emotions, minds, and imaginations within the boundaries of the ritual space and time. This process can be understood as a series of scenes, each one of which ends with a distinctive action which moves the ritual on to the next scene. They are (I have italicized the pivotal actions ending each scene):

Scene 1: The participants open themselves to a new communal identity in relation to the divine—from the Opening Acclamation to the *affirmation of faith* in the Nicene Creed.

Scene 2: They deepen their commitment to one another and being to act as a new community—from the Prayers of the People to *the Peace and the Offertory.*

Scene 3: They are consecrated as a holy people and fed with sacred food—from the Sursum Corda-Preface-Sanctus to the *Communion.*

Scene 4: They acknowledge their new status as "living members" of Christ and go forth—Postcommunion Prayer to the *Dismissal.*

This is powerful, and insofar as the members of the congregation do experience this through-line, it would seem that the Rite II Eucharistic liturgy does have constitutive efficacy, as described above: by participating in the ritual, they will come to a new or reinforced sense of identity, of belonging. In addition, as this new People is sent forth into the world, there is the hope of operational efficacy. But we need to distinguish in the case of any ritual between its potential and its actual efficacy. It seems clear from the above that Rite II is at least potentially effective. However, I believe that there are three serious difficulties with the through-line of the Rite II Eucharist which impede the actualizing of this potential efficacy. First, at certain points in the liturgy discrete sections are merely juxtaposed—a + b + c—rather than one flowing "naturally" or "logically" into the other. Second, the efficacy of the through-line is muted by the limited participation of the worshippers in the actions of the liturgy. Third, the through-line is not assertive enough in sending the newly formed People forth into the world.

Interruptions of through-line flow. When sections of the liturgy are merely juxtaposed, following the liturgy becomes a matter of learning by rote what comes next rather than a heart-felt experience of being borne along. In the Rite II Eucharist, at the end of the liturgy of the Word, several actions follow one another which "work" fine separately, but which give no sense of the progressive transformation of persons becoming more and more deeply "a people." I have in mind the sequence of the Creed, followed by the Prayers of the People, followed by the Confession. While in each of these speech-acts individually an identity is clearly being formed—in the Creed, as believers in communion

79

with believers through the centuries; in the Prayers of the People, as compassionate people linked with the widest possible community of care and concern ("the welfare of the world"); in the Confession, as struggling persons who have failed to love God and neighbor and yet are forgiven, strengthened, and kept "in eternal life"—there seems to be no discernable path from one to another. Another mere one-after-another sequence, it seems to me, is the move from the Great Amen to the Lord's Prayer to the Fraction. The effect of the juxtaposition of these discrete sections is to limit the power of the ritual to carry the participants through a transformation, in this case a transformation of identity. In other words, the constitutive efficacy of the ritual is to some extent stunted.

Limited participation. A more serious problem with the through-line comes from the restricted nature of the participation of the non-celebrants (i.e., the ones who are not presiding) in the ritual. In the Eucharistic Prayer or Great Thanksgiving, for example, the celebrant recites most of the prayers and performs the most significant ritual actions. The other participants verbally respond in the Sursum Corda dialogue and the Memorial Acclamation (in Prayer C there are more "lines" for the congregation, but still the bulk of the prayers are said by the celebrant [BCP, 369-372]). Their ritual actions are restricted to either standing or kneeling.

I want to argue that this seriously restricts the impact of the ritual, specifically with respect to ritual's power to re-form the bodies of the participants. The text of a ritual is intended to be embodied, and moves into embodiment through what contemporary performance theorists call the "mise-en scène," defined as "a complex group of

80

operations, each of which transcribes a message written in a given sign system (literary writing, musical notation) and turns it into a message capable of being inscribed on human bodies and transmitted by those to the other bodies: a kind of somatography."[114] The "inscription" onto bodies takes place in the repeated actions—including speech-acts—of the ritual in performance. While a performance of a Rite II Eucharist is obviously embodied, and to that extent does inscribe the text on the bodies of the participants, the amount of actual enactment other than simple postures and occasional verbal acts is limited. The large exceptions to this are the exchange of the Peace, which is optional; the bringing forward of the Offertory by representatives of the congregation (BCP, 361), and the Communion, admittedly the primary symbolic act of the ritual. However I find it poignant to read in Stulhman's outline the headings in quotation marks, taken from the Order for Celebrating the Eucharist: "They [i.e., the priest and the people] gather in the Lord's name," "They proclaim and respond to the Word of God," "They make Eucharist," "They Break the Bread" In fact, they mostly do not do any of these things, although ideal participants in the ritual will join explicitly or emotionally in the prayers of the celebrant and be prayerfully "involved" in the celebrant's actions. But this remains in most performances of the Eucharist an ideal rather than what actually happens; the liturgy for the most part does not itself gather the people up in the through-line and

---

[114]Jean-François Lyotard, quoted by Sudipo Chatterjee, "Mise-en-(Colonial-) Scène: The Theatre of the Bengal Renaissance" in *Imperialism and Theatre: Essays on World Theatre, Drama and Performance* ed. J. Ellen Gainor (London: Routledge, 1995), 25.

81

carry them along through active ritual participation. With the significant exceptions noted above, the "inscriptions on the body" made by this ritual as it unfolds are minimal and this diminishes its efficacy. Most especially, it limits the liturgy's operational efficacy, the possibility of changing participants' behaviors in the world beyond the ritual.

Inadequate commissioning to "go forth." The through-line of the Rite II Eucharist fails to adequately send the participants back out into the world. There is, I believe, a tension between the underlying through-line and the "script" of the words spoken at the end of the liturgy. In the first alternative of the Postcommunion prayer, the celebrant and people pray together: "Send us now into the world in peace, and grant us strength and courage to love and serve you with gladness and singleness of heart . . . " (BCP, 365); in the second, they pray: ". . . send us out to do the work you have given us to do, to love and serve you as faithful witnesses of Christ our Lord" (BCP, 366). Then follows the Dismissal dialogue for which the text gives four versions, to all of which the response is "Thanks be to God." The first three—"Let us go forth in the name of Christ," "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord," "Let us go forth into the world, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit" (BCP, 366)—clearly direct the people outward from the ritual space and time. In the combination of the Postcommunion prayer and three versions of the Dismissal, then, there is a clear directionality indicated by the text and enacted in speech-acts by the celebrant and other participants. Yet it seems to me that this directionality is to some extent contradicted or undermined by a through-line which seems to bring the ritual to an end at the Communion, or, alternatively, treats the action of Communion as the

culmination of the ritual. This is apparent in the text of both the Rite II liturgy per se and the Order for Celebrating the Holy Eucharist. In the former, the final heading in the text is "The Breaking of the Bread" (364); in the latter, it is "[The People and Priest] Share the Gifts of God" (BCP, 401). There is no separate heading highlighting the significance of the sending out. This textual blindspot is reinforced by the fact that the "going forth" is not ritualized in gesture or action, although, as we have seen, it is expressed in speech-acts shared by the celebrant and the other participants.[115]

Insofar as the participants leave the ritual as a People of God and members of Christ, and "do the work [God] has given [them] to do," the ritual has strong operational efficacy. But the concern expressed here is that the transition from the liturgy to daily life is not upheld by the ritual's through-line, and that significantly weakens the crucial acts of sending and going forth.

Space and Time

In the processual, embodied event which is the Rite II Eucharistic liturgy, as in all other performances, the ordinary space and time of everyday life is overlaid with a distinctive "dramatic" space-time which shapes the communication event as well as delimiting who and what is included within it. I will discuss, in this section, two features

---

[115]It is interesting to note that the fourth alternative Dismissal form is "Let us bless the Lord" which nearly echoes the very first words of the liturgy: "Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit . . . (BCP, 355), and seems, in circling back in this way, to further weaken the sending forth.

of the space-time of the liturgy which affect the efficacy of the ritual: first, the

hierarchical ordering of the space, and second, the strongly revelatory character of the

liturgy's multilayering of space and time.

"Ordering" of the space and time. The ritual space in the Rite II Eucharistic liturgy is

primarily defined by the presence of an altar or "Holy Table" (BCP, 406), which should

be, Stuhlman says,"a freestanding table . . . in the midst of the people rather than

separated from them."[116]

Yet, as the ritual's participants gather, there is a clear spatial, as well as functional,

differentiation between the celebrant and the people. The differentiation is based on

ecclesiastical "order," the division of members of the denomination into bishops, priests,

deacons, and laity. That the differentiation of the participants into orders plays a

significant part in the enactment of the Rite II liturgy is witnessed to by the introductory

rubrics to the Eucharistic rites in the 1979 Prayer Book. Five out of six rubrics set out

positions and functions according to membership in one of the orders. In several of these

rubrics, status "position" and physical position are conjoined, for example in the rubric

stating that, "It is appropriate that the other priests present stand with the celebrant at the

Altar, and join in the consecration of the gifts, in breaking the Bread, and in distributing

Communion" (BCP 322). This indicates that, to some extent, where people are placed in

---

[116]Stuhlman, *Eucharistic Celebration,* 152. Some rubrics within the Rite II Eucharistic
Prayer which refer to the Celebrant "facing the Holy Table" in apparent contrast to facing
the people, seem to be remnants from pre-1979 celebrations of the Eucharist when the
altar was assumed to be fixed to the back wall. See, for example, BCP, 361.

the ritual space depends on a prior status, a persistent identity acknowledged by the community and continuing in the world outside the ritual.[117] The altar is clearly associated spatially with the priestly orders, with the celebrant (a bishop or priest) and other priests clustered in its vicinity (although lay persons may be in this area as well), while the bulk of the people are somewhat separate from it, whether in front, around, or on three sides of the altar (Stuhlman's ideal configuration[118]). The ordered (in several senses) nature of the ritual space can be considered to form two performance areas—where the celebrant is and where "the people" are.

The spatial ordering into two performance areas bridged by speech is broken through by physical movements several times during the ritual, possibly in the optional Gospel procession into "the midst of the people," possibly at the Peace (the Exchange of the Peace is optional in Rite II), and definitely in the Offertory and Communion. The rubrics for the Offertory are quite clear, in fact, that the two spaces should be traversed: "Representatives of the congregation bring the people's offering of bread and wine, and money or other gifts, to the deacon or celebrant" (BCP, 361). And the celebrant and other ministers are instructed by the rubrics to "deliver [the Sacrament] to the people" (365) who come forward to receive (BCP, 407).

The warping of the ritual space into a hierarchical "order"ing is reinforced at one

---

[117]This is obviously quite different from an actor taking on a role for the duration of a play.

[118]Stuhlman, 152.

point in the ritual by an analogous ordering of temporal sequence: one of the "Additional Directions" specifies that "While the people are coming forward to receive Communion, the celebrant receives the Sacrament in both kinds. The bishops, priests, and deacons at the Holy Table then communicate, and after them the people" (BCP, 407).[119]

The text of the liturgy does suggest another possible interpretation of the division of space. The liturgy begins and ends with dialogues between the celebrant and the people. The celebrant, people, and both together alternate speech-acts and actions throughout the liturgy, although the greater part of each is performed by the celebrant. Could the assignment of liturgical tasks and the consequent forming of the space by the ritual be understood as dialogical, rather than hierarchical? The problem with this, of course, is the underlying fact that the functions are underpinned by a status, canonical order, which is itself permanently conferred by the prior ritual action of ordination. But, as we will see in the final section, it may be fruitful to push Eucharistic liturgy and the space it forms farther in the direction of a dialogical/functional, rather than a hierarchical/order-based, division.

However, given the dominance of the latter in the current Rite II liturgy, what impact does the hierarchalization of the ritual space have on the efficacy of the liturgy? Another formulation of this question in terms of our analysis of ritual as a communication event,

---

[119]The Additional Directions (BCP, 406-409), like the rubrics in Concerning the Service (BCP, 322), apply to both the Rite I and Rite II Eucharistic liturgies, and the Order for Celebrating the Holy Eucharist.

is: what is communicated to the liturgy's participants by the hierarchalization of the space and how well is it communicated? I see two answers. First, Rite II is constitutively effective in establishing at least two identities within the ritual's participants—the celebrant and others belonging to the "ordained" orders on the one hand, and "the people" on the other. Given the dominant role of hierarchy in forming the ritual space, I believe that the liturgy is quite effective in splitting the participants into (at least) two hierarchically ordered identities. Second, the liturgy is effective in the first sense of operational efficacy described above,[120] that of changing or reinforcing behavior having to do with power relationships outside of the context of the ritual. In its formation of the bodies of the ritual participants, the Rite II liturgy leads in the direction of an acceptance of hierarchical relationships. This is so precisely because of the nondiscursive nature of the ritual performance. This liturgy, as Zdzislaw Mach says of ritual in general, "creates a reality of power, acts it out, and provides it with an aura of sacredness and traditional values."[121] Hierarchical ordering in the Rite II liturgy is not stated, justified, thought—it is enacted, embodied, and lived into.

Akahsah: what shines forth. As we have seen, it is an intrinsic quality of performance to *layer* space and time in an ontologically complex communication event. As with all performances, the external, physical space and time of the Eucharistic ritual have an

---

[120]See above 42-44.

[121]Mach, 83.

interior aspect as well; the outward spatial and temporal arrangements, even taken in

their simplest, linear senses are weighted with meanings, memories, and emotions. There

are a number of points at which either or both the ritual space and time are layered with

"more than" the here and the now. The "more than" comes to be and is revealed in the

ritual space and time, the *akahsah* of the performance.[122] Some significant examples are:

——the invoking of the divine presence into the ritual space with the dialogue, "The
Lord be with you"/"and also with you"

——the reading of the lessons (including the psalm and gospel) whose interwoven
stories, characters, images, and themes enrich the web of meanings, memories, and
emotions already present in the ritual space and time; in terms of time, the lessons also
contextualize the ritual in terms of the symbolic calendar of the liturgical year, itself
playing out the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ

——the drawing into the ritual space of objects of concern and thanksgiving;
reaching out to gather in "the World and the Church" (BCP, 400), in all its pain and joy

——the opening of the space to the heavenly "company of angels and archangels" in
the Preface

——the acknowledgment of an eschatological dimension which is both here ("keep
you in eternal life" [BCP, 360] and "not-yet" ("thy kingdom come"[BCP, 364]} and the
implications of the request to be sent out "to do the work you have given us to do" [366])

——the deepening intensity of the past-becoming-present which begins with the
Eucharistic Prayer culminates in the physical eating and drinking of the Communion;
physical movement, touch, smell, taste, emotion in the present make the remembering of
the past events of Jesus' life and death radically here-and-now.

The multilayering of *this* space and time with other spaces and times in the

performance of the Rite II Eucharistic liturgy provides a rich matrix which works below

_____

and beyond discourse in the communication event of the Eucharist. Past and future become present, the whole worlds of earth and heaven become here. Because of this layering, the ritual is efficacious in the revelatory sense. Insofar as the participants are actively engaged in it, the liturgy is the medium for an encounter with an alternative network of relationships in a layered time which is both "eternal life" (in which the worshippers the participate) and yet a "not-yet-now": a network of relationships with the whole world as an object of concern and thanksgiving; with the lineage of all the saints and the "company of heaven," and with Jesus Christ, revealed in the stories of his life, death, and resurrection and in the breaking of bread and pouring out of wine.

The Rite II liturgy, by virtue of its multilayering of space and time, has revelatory efficacy for its participants insofar as they are actively engaged in it (see the discussion of the through-line, above). The worshippers encounter a numinous realm, a vividly expanded reality comprising the divine, the "company of heaven," the faithful living and dead, and all who suffer. This vision-made-real breaks open a revelation of what is possible, what can be hoped for, and from the perspective it reveals, ordinary, accepted reality can be judged.

We have seen that the multilayered space and time of the Rite II Eucharistic liturgy pulls in several quite different ways on the participants in the ritual. On one hand, the ritual space in Rite II is primarily hierarchical space differentiated largely by "order," a permanent status, itself conferred ritually in ceremonies of ordination. This kind of ritual space constitutively effects a division of identity into two groups—those who can

89

be celebrants and those who are "the people"— and operationally effects a tendency to accept hierarchical power relationships in the extra-ritual world. On the other hand, the numinous world which the liturgy layers with ordinary space and time reveals a divinely warranted alternative to that ordinary world and exposes it—including at least some sorts of power relationships—to judgement. In the Rite II liturgy, the various effects of the communication to the participants arising from the nature of the ritual space and time thus exist in radical tension with one another, with no clear resolution provided by the ritual itself.

Symbols

The third aspect we have been looking at in our study of performance is the web of symbols which makes up the "material" or "stuff" of the communication to and among the participants in the performance. Symbols, as we have seen, can be physical objects, gestures, or actions, as well as interactions among them. In the Rite II Eucharistic liturgy the primary physical object symbols are the bread and the cup of wine, the altar or "Holy Table," and money and other offerings besides the bread and wine. Of these, clearly the most central are the altar, which literally "centers" the action, and the bread and the wine, physical symbols which are richly multivalent and ambiguous.[123]

Since the Eucharist is a performance, a processual whole, the physical symbols are not merely statically present, but are ritually acted with and on in a complex of gestures

---

[123]See above, 33-36.

and movements which also have symbolic force. Among these are: arranging of the participants with respect to the altar; bringing forward the bread, wine, money, and other offerings, and placing them on the altar; the officiant touching the bread and the cup during the Institution Narrative, and of course, the climactic symbolic action of the eating and drinking of the elements at the Communion. The symbolic objects and gestures/movements are at the same time intertwined with the speech acts of the Eucharistic Prayer from the Institution Narrative to the Doxology, the prayers at Communion, and the post-Communion Prayer.

A number of gestures which occur in the ritual do not involve symbolic objects, for example, the postures of standing or kneeling, the passing of the Peace and the blessing gestures (when they are used). But they have the same characteristics as symbolic objects: they carry a host of emotive, imagistic, and cognitive meanings which are never able to be fully delimited and they have a power in themselves which attracts or, sometimes, repels. Good indicators of the potency of symbolic gestures are the resistance to the passing of the Peace in some churches and disagreements about standing versus kneeling during the Eucharistic Prayer.

In our discussion above of the nature of ritual symbols, we cited Alexander Schmemann's characterization of such symbols as "epiphanic," manifesting and communicating the divine by virtue of itself participating in it.[124] The participant, we said,

_____

[124]See above, 62.

91

is drawn into the realm of the divine by the power of the ritual symbols. In the Rite II Eucharistic ritual, the most powerful symbols are clustered around the Communion feast: the bread, the wine, the altar/holy table, the People of God who share the feast, as well as the symbolic actions of preparing, offering, and eating and drinking. They evoke (through the speech-acts associated with them) especially the meanings of the Last Supper, the Body and Blood of Christ "given for you," the "Gifts of God," and the paschal sacrifice associated with the forming and freeing from bondage of the people of Israel.

In the communication event of the Rite II Eucharistic ritual, these central symbols seem to function primarily to guarantee and uphold the formation of the new identity (or the re-membering of the identity) of the participants as the People of God. They thus, at least potentially, strengthen the constitutive efficacy of the ritual. Because of the multivalency of the symbols any expression of this in words has to be kaleidoscopic (and must always be partial): they become a consecrated people, sharing an eschatological feast ("the holy food and drink of new and unending life in him" [BCP, 363]); they eat and drink the Body and Blood of Christ, becoming members of Christ's body; they partake of the paschal sacrifice, becoming a people saved by God's action as the Israelites were saved; they receive the "Gifts of God."

While, however, the ritual uses the central symbolic objects and actions very effectively to create and reinforce identity, it is weak from the point of view of operational efficacy—it fails to exploit other meanings that would tend to push participants outward into changed relationships and actions in the world beyond the ritual.

The equality of the sharing in the reception of Communion is potentially a challenge to the People of God to confront structures of power in the world. The breaking of the bread, the pouring out of the wine, as well as the identification of the broken bread and poured out wine with the Body and Blood of Christ, could be mined for meanings that call for passionate, self-giving action. In fact, however, the ritual's use of the symbolic content reinforces the tendency of its through-line, as we saw above, to carry the worshippers to the reception of Communion and then stop, treating the sending forth of the people as secondary.

<center>**********</center>

We have considered the Rite II Eucharist from the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*, looking at the ways it communicates to participants by means of its through-line, layering of space and time, and matrix of symbols, and evaluating how effective this communication is in terms of its ability to change the participants and through them the world outside the ritual. We have concluded that the ritual is potentially effective, but this potentiality is to some extent not actualized because a. there are weaknesses in the through-line which limit the formation of a new identity as the People of God and do not provide a strong commission/dismissal to move the people outward into the world; b. there are contradictory pulls in the space-time of the ritual between the strongly revelatory character of the ritual's space-time and its hierarchalizing of space; and c. the range of symbolic meanings highlighted in the ritual emphasizes the formation of identity (constitutive efficacy) while failing to exploit other possible meanings which impel action

in the world (operational efficacy).

Indian Street Theatre and Eucharistic Liturgy: Towards a More Emancipatory Performance

In this section we shall return to Indian street theatre, our paradigm of emancipatory performance. We shall use it as a lens to sharpen our focus on issues in the performance of the Eucharist, raise questions about that performance, and explore possible directions towards a transforming of Eucharist liturgy so that it may more effectively mediate the promise of emancipation/liberation/salvation.

In Chapter 1, we defined "emancipatory performances" as "performances which lead to deeper and fuller humanity for some, without compromising the essential humanity of others."[125] But while Indian street theatre clearly falls under this definition, does it apply to Eucharistic rituals? Is this not too "humanistic" a definition for a religious sacrament?

There are two responses to this objection. First, in the discussion of "humanity" and "humanization" in Chapter 1, the concepts were defined broadly as ranging over all the conditions of human life, from basic survival needs to a relationship with a transcendent presence or ideal, beyond the here and now, and not "owned" by the present moment. This latter clearly relates to religious ritual, and is even compatible with a quite "spiritual" notion of salvation. Second, the participants in Eucharistic rituals are, for the

---

[125]See above, 46.

most part at least, baptized Christians. They come to the Eucharist already ritually formed by the sacrament of Baptism. As such, they have entered into a covenantal relationship with God in which they have promised to "seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving [their] neighbor as [themselves]" and to "strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being" (BCP, 305). Echoes of this are heard within the Rite II Eucharist itself, for example in the Confession, when the worshippers confess that "we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves," express repentance, and ask for forgiveness (BCP, 360). The Catechism of the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* reinforces the social—the human-directed—dimension of the Eucharist. It affirms that one of the benefits of the Eucharist is "the strengthening of our union with Christ and one another" (BCP, 860). And it includes among "what is required of us when we come to the Eucharist," the stipulation that participants should "be in love and charity with all people" (BCP, 860). The Eucharistic ritual, then, intends to be not only effective but emancipatory in the sense defined in Chapter 1—leading to deeper and fuller humanity, ultimately for all people. And in so intending, it is a radical performance since it fulfills the definition of challenging and re-envisioning "ingrained social arrangements of power" insofar as those social arrangements prevent being in "love and charity" with all people, or impede striving "for justice and peace among all people" and "respecting the dignity of every human being."

Given this, then what can we learn about Eucharistic ritual from Indian street theatre, our paradigm of emancipatory performance? What does it suggest for reforming

Eucharistic liturgy so that God's liberative/salvific action may be mediated and communicated more effectively? We shall look briefly at each of the three components of nondiscursive communication, asking what questions Indian street theatre raises for Eucharistic liturgy in each of the areas of through-line, ritual space and time, and symbol, and indicating for each some practical suggestions for re-forming liturgy to be a more effectively emancipatory performance.

Through-Line

We saw in Chapter 1 how Indian street theatre radically challenges (consider Mungai's *The Newborn*) and re-envisions (consider Ramanna's play about the indebted couple saved by an act of Dalit solidarity) social structures which systemically prevent the achievement of full humanity. This suggests that the through-line of any emancipatory performance must involve the breaking down of structures and the posing of alternatives. That is, it must processually embody *opposition to oppression* and *re-envision a fuller human life,* a life of "justice, dignity, and peace."

But the firmly pragmatic character of Indian street theatre warns us that opposition and re-envisioning which ends with the end of the performance is not emancipatory. Rather, the through-line of an emancipatory performance must be strongly *directional,* propelling the participants out into action towards actually creating the re-envisioned alternatives in the world. It is certain that both Mungai and Ramanna intend the effects of their work to continue long after the performance.

Taking Indian street theatre as paradigmatic of emancipatory performances, then, suggests that for a Eucharistic ritual to be effective toward emancipation it should have a through-line which a. poses a sharp distinction between what is and what is yearned for and b. provides a clear trajectory which carries the participants beyond the ritual into the daily world. It is important to note that these are not merely formal requirements towards increased efficacy; "emancipatory" carries a distinctive content, as we have seen. So an emancipatory Eucharistic ritual is called to oppose whatever limits the achievement of full humanity, and to launch participants into efforts to create a world in which "the forces of love, justice, and peace may prevail," in the words of C.S. Song,[126] or, alternatively, in which the promises of the Baptismal covenant are truly lived out.

The critique in the last section of the through-line of the Rite II liturgy from the point of view of efficacy has consequences for its emancipatory power and can be reframed more strongly in emancipatory terms: God's liberative/salvific action is communicated less effectively than it might be by the through-line of the Rite II liturgy because it forms the bodies of the participants in a very limited way and fails to provide a sufficient underpinning for the sending forth of the worshippers to work to create a world of justice, peace and dignity for all people. A re-formed Eucharistic ritual seeking to be more emancipatorily effective will need to provide a more explicitly oppositional, visionary, and directional through-line which is enacted in a more participatory way by

---

[126]Song, 185.

the worshippers. I want to suggest two quite general ways of re-forming the through-line of the Eucharistic liturgy:

Finding and implementing an alternative. We have seen that one articulation of the through-line of the Rite II liturgy is the formation of a new community. The ritual, as we saw, ideally takes the participants step-by-step from people who come together out of their disparate lives and forms them into a "People of God," and sends them out of the ritual as "living members" of Jesus Christ.[127] But we identified a tendency to linger within the ritual; the through-line does not seem to move participants strongly enough out of the ritual and into the world.

I want to suggest an alternative through-line for a reconstructed Eucharistic ritual: a dynamic unity consisting of a double motion which involves *both* breaking down barriers— between past and present, future and present, heaven and earth; among the participants; between those praying here and those suffering there— *and* entering into com-munion. In its double motion, this through-line would communicate the reality of the realm of God in which *all* are invited to the feast, all forgive and are forgiven, all receive their daily bread. Once the participants have entered into the ritual they are carried along by this double motion and then—since it is about breaking through barriers—the "internal logic" of the through-line carries them out beyond the apparent boundary of the end of the ritual into a way of life which enacts the same dynamic of breaking down and bringing

---

[127]See above, 77.

98

into union what has been separated. Like the ripples of questioning left behind in the villages by Mungai's play, the pattern established by the double current of the through-line will ripple outward to continue the effect of the ritual in the world: to break down barriers to justice, dignity, and peace.

I am influenced in this formulation of an alternative through-line for the Eucharistic ritual by Alexander Schmemann, who sees the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, as the way the church "fulfills itself as the body of Christ, as the divine *parousia*—the presence and the communication of Christ and his kingdom."[128] For Schmemann, that sacramental presence and communication results, for those who encounter it and in it experience God's love, in their becoming "real co-workers in the work of Christ,"[129] committed to the transformation of "state, society, culture, [and] nature itself."[130] I believe that in a reconstructed Eucharistic ritual, the encounter with the powerful, faithful, ongoing action of God in breaking down barriers and bringing what was separated into com-munion would indeed form "real co-workers in the work of Christ."

The alternative through-line suggested here would affect the order of prayers and actions in the ritual. I want to point out just one possibility. In Eucharistic Prayer D of

---

[128]Alexander Schmemann, "The Missionary Imperative in the Orthodox Tradition," in *The Theology of the Christian Mission* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1961), 253.

[129]Ibid., 255.

[130]Ibid., 256.

Rite II, the Epiclesis is followed by a brief version of the Prayers of the People. I believe

that this positioning should be normative for an emancipatory Eucharistic ritual. It seems

to me ideal that precisely at this sacred time of remembrance of Christ's life, death, and

resurrection the hearts of the worshippers are called upon to break down barriers of

distance, ignorance, insensitivity, and demonization, to achieve the com-munion of

concern and empathy for the other. The Indian theologian Kenith David vividly expresses

this connection between intercessory prayer and the breaking of barriers:

> In its origins, ['intercession'] connotes the fullness and depth
> of an encounter with another human being. Its image of being beside
> someone in need is succinctly rendered in English by the phrase, 'to
> feel the pulse.' Feeling the pulse requires two people to be beside each
> other, one holding the wrist of the other. Feeling the pulse enables the
> recognition and identification of pain; it has to do with life-and-blood
> realities. If feeling the pulse leads to the prescription and implementation
> of remedies, then our intercessions in church or anywhere else must
> become the nerve-center and backbone of our remedies for economic
> dislocation, political bankrupcy, cultural recovery and renewal, and so on.[131]

Increased participation. In the analysis of the Rite II liturgy above, I argued that the

efficacy, especially the operational efficacy, of the ritual was limited by the lack of active

participation by "the people" during significant sections, for example during the

Eucharistic Prayer. Related to this is the failure to explicitly ritualize crucial parts of the

liturgy like the Dismissal. The following suggestions are ways in which a reconstructed

Eucharistic liturgy could increase participation of "the people" and ritualization of crucial

---

[131]Kenith David, *Sacrament and Struggle* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994), 38.

parts of the breaking of boundaries and joining into fuller com-munion:

—Procession of the people to the altar at the Offertory and gathering around the

altar for the Eucharistic Prayer and beyond should be made normative. This action of the

whole "people" is an expansion of the Rite II liturgy's insistence that "representatives of

the congregation bring the people's offerings of bread and wine, and money or other gifts,

to the deacon or celebrant" (BCP, 361). What is a representative act should be made an

act of the whole. The action of moving together into the space where the eschatological

feast will be celebrated is at the same time an enacted remembering of the Exodus event

which formed the Israelites into one people; of the many times Jesus fed and/or ate with

people, often breaking the boundaries of social class and purity/impurity; and of the

eschatological banquet which will be made "for all peoples" (Is. 25:6).

—The Eucharistic Prayer should be reframed so that the individual sections are

shorter and are each followed by an appropriate response.[132]

—A more radical sharing of the ritual actions would involve multiple loaves and

cups place around the Holy Table, with the "taking, blessing, and breaking"[133] performed

by a number of people.

---

[132]Eucharistic Prayer C (BCP, 370-372) follows this pattern, but the prayers should be still more brief, and the response, instead of varying, be the same, which would entail less focus on the written word in the Prayer Book and more on what is going on in the Prayer itself, as well as giving a deeper and more rhythmic intensity to the action. Again, the most effective ritual action—which includes speech-acts—is nondiscursive.

[133]Three of the four components of the "shape" of the Eucharistic ritual (the fourth is sharing, in the Communion) identified by Dom Gregory Dix. Cited in Stuhlman, 126-7.

—The Dismissal should be expanded and more fully ritualized. The function of this section of the Eucharist is not to provide a tidy ending to a worship performance. Rather, like the opening of the question of female infanticide to the audience in Mungai's *The Newborn,* its point is to "create ripples," or to carry the through-line beyond the performance into the world of daily life. It is the "missio," the "ite, missa est" of the Latin Mass, whose very name conveys the notion of "sending." Some possible enactments:

a. The Lord's Prayer, with its familiar but powerful linking of daily bread, daily forgiveness with the "kingdom, power, and glory" of the divine might be said after the Communion.

b. The Post-Communion prayers should include a sense of commissioning, of being sent out together into the world, as well as an opportunity for self-dedication. A possible form would be :

> O God, through the grace of your Son Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, grant us those gifts we need to do your work in the world. *Here people name specific gifts—e.g., a prophetic voice, courage, holy anger, compassion . . . There should be silence after each naming.* Touch us with new life, fill us with hope that your kingdom will come, the hungry will be fed, the oppressed set free, and your reconciling work be done, so that the whole earth will be filled with your glory.[134]

c. The Dismissal should be just that—a dis-missal, a separating, a cutting off

---

[134]The ending of this prayer (after the rubrics), is adapted from Christopher Duraisingh and Eric Lott, "An Indian Liturgy," in *Worship in an Indian Context* ed. Eric J. Lott (Bangalore: United Theological College, 1986), 77. Note the powerful use of the indicative mood ("will come," etc.), rather than the usual explicit or implied subjunctive mood ("may come") of much liturgical language.

from the safe mooring of "holy space." Not only should it be ritualized but the ritualization should have energy. One possible way to enact the dismissal in a conventional church space would be for the worship leaders to say words of dismissal and then follow the people, led by a crucifer, to and even out the door.

All of these suggestions involve increased participation, and thus a more active forming of the body of the individual worshipper and the corporate body of worshippers with the intent of increasing the operational efficacy of the liturgy in the direction of emancipation.

Ritual Space and Time

Looking at the nature of the space-time complexity of the Rite II Eucharistic liturgy through the lens of Indian street theatre, we can see two shifts in emphasis for a reconstructed ritual that would more effectively mediate the emancipatory power of the Eucharist. First, Indian street theatre is firmly embedded in the existential struggles of daily life and is actually performed in the midst of those struggles. An effectively emancipatory Eucharistic ritual will be *contextual,* rooted more deeply and explicitly in the lived world of the participants and especially in the sufferings of that world. The situating of most Eucharistic rituals in bounded holy spaces—churches, chapels, or cathedrals— tends to loosen the connections of the worshippers to the contexts in which they live their lives. In ritual, they often become less, rather than more, humanly connected.

To reconstruct Eucharistic ritual using the paradigm of Indian street theatre, we must ask how the conditions which *now* are holding people in bondage, both in and beyond the immediate community of the worshippers can be most effectively pointed to within the ritual. We must ask how the people who are *now* suffering, excluded, oppressed, treated as expendable, can be gathered into the ritual space and how the arena of their suffering can be grasped by the liturgy's participants as where they are being sent. Both could be accomplished by a sharpening of the Prayers of the People so that the participants in the ritual overtly open themselves to the reality of those who suffer (including, it must be said, their own sorrows, fears, and pain[135]). The formulations of these prayers must be quite deliberate, in order to ensure that the ritual participants face what one Indian theatre activist called "the reality around us that we try to evade."[136]

But I see the paradigm of Indian street theatre as calling Eucharistic liturgy to a more radical and literal shift with respect to space. Perhaps the time has come to shift the normative space of the ritual from church to streets, parks, and public buildings. The sacred space necessary for the performance of the Eucharist can be created by the simple

---

[135]Randall Nichols addresses the confrontation with the suffering among the participants of the ritual as one aspect of the liminality: ". . . if sensitively and intelligently done, [worship] can address and draw out those aspects of our real, everyday existence which in fact are already liminal—whether it be poverty, illness, loss of a job, divorce, bereavement, dislocation, or anything else. . . ." "Worship as Anti-Structure: the Contribution of Victor Turner," *Theology Today*, no. 41 (Jan. 1985), 408.

[136]*Kulavai '96* (Chennai [Madras]: M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, 1997), videotape.

presence of a table and the ritual action of gathering the people. Enacting the Eucharistic

ritual in "public" spaces would have strong efficacy towards emancipation in a number of

ways: a. it would firmly root the performance in local conditions of suffering,

exploitation, and exclusion; b. it would form the identity of—literally—a wayfaring

"People of God"; and c. it would underline the directionality of the ritual, since the

"boundary" between Eucharistic performance and the world of daily living would be

clearly seen as a permeable

boundary that must be crossed.[137]

Second, a reconstructed Eucharist must challenge established power relationships

by addressing the hierarchalization of ritual space we saw in Rite II. The way ritual

participants are distributed in space, the ways they are allowed and not allowed to move,

are operationally effective and establish what are counted as right relationships in the

world outside the ritual.[138] The Roman Catholic liturgist Mary Collins asserts that "rituals

are about relationships."[139] An attempt to construct a more effectively emancipatory

Eucharistic ritual must grapple with the issue of what kinds of relationships to embody

and enact in the ritual space as "rehearsals" of transformed relationships in the extra-ritual

---

[137]All of these are in evidence every week at the Common Cathedral service, a Eucharist celebrated for a congregation of homeless persons and others on Boston Common by the Rev. Deborah Little.

[138]See above, 42-3, on the operational efficacy of performance.

[139]Mary Collins, "Principles of Feminist Liturgy," in *Women in Worship* ed. Marjorie Proctor-Smith and Janet R. Walton (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 11.

world. Given the realities of Episcopal Church order and the theology of ordination, re-forming the Eucharistic liturgy must allow for some functional division by order, especially in the requirement that a bishop or priest preside or be one of the presiders at the Eucharistic prayer. However, even given the need to conform to present canonical requirements, the relationships embodied and enacted in the ritual space can be made more dialogical. Some strategies:

—The celebrants or "presiders" could be scattered among the people, at least for the Liturgy of the Word and possibly for the Eucharistic Prayer. Multiple voices coming from different directions are very effective in changing the sense of space.

—Where logistically feasible, the homily might be preceded or followed by other participants' reactions to the lessons.

—Much more can be made of the Offertory procession. It can certainly be made more festive, using music and movement to express and evoke emotions of overflowing thanksgiving: is this not a "Eucharist," a thanksgiving?

—Greater use could be made of litanies and other forms involving responses, including, as was mentioned above, the Eucharistic Prayer.

—Communion could be given and received in smaller groups scattered around the ritual space. The altar would function as a center around which stations for Communion would form, creating a circular space rather than a "head and foot" or "forward and backward" space.

Symbols

What insights does the perspective of Indian street theatre as emancipatory

performance bring to the use of symbols in the Eucharistic liturgy? As we have seen, the

major symbols in the Rite II liturgy are bread, wine, the altar or "holy table," and the

People of God, together with the symbolic actions associated with them. Two

reorientations to these fundamental Eucharistic symbols are suggested by the paradigm of

Indian street theatre. First, Indian street theatre, while making use of powerful symbols,

often revalues them. Symbols which are revered in the dominant culture, for example,

may be ridiculed or otherwise denigrated while an object or action characteristic of the

life of the oppressed or the excluded may be elevated to a status of honor.[140] Or the

symbol may be plumbed for hitherto unrealized meanings—or questioned—as in the

street production by Pralayan's troupe which addressed the problem of female infanticide

obliquely by portraying the story of a daughter who remains as the only faithful child to

light her father's funeral pyre, a role traditionally reserved for the son.[141]

Analogously, from the multivalent symbols of bread and wine, additional

meanings to those used in the Rite II Eucharist may be drawn on in a reconstructed

liturgy. In line with the emancipatory call to seek justice, peace, and dignity for all

[140]In recent years, many Dalits have reclaimed the playing of their traditional frame drums as a sign of identity and pride, despite the fact that historically the drums functioned as symbols of their subservience, since they were linked with notions of death/pollution/impurity and played at caste Hindu funerals. See Clarke, 67.

[141]Pralayan, interview by author, Chennai (Madras),18 July, 1998.

107

people, other meanings of these central symbols may be highlighted, meanings which

draw the ritual's participants, through the power of the symbols, into the reality of the

sufferings of poverty and exploitative social relationships. Bread and wine, for example,

are produced by human labor in collaboration with the fecundity of the earth, and they are

inextricably enmeshed in economic structures of production and distribution. Some

people have bread and wine easily, "freely," without thinking about it. Others struggle

daily for enough food and drink to maintain the lives of themselves and their children.

The meanings evoked by the physical bread and wine and the ritual gestures and actions

in which they are embedded will, in a more effectively emancipatory Eucharist, include

the processes by which and the social structures within which, the bread and wine were

produced. As Enrique Dussel has compellingly expressed it: "The bread contains the

objective life of the worker, his blood, his intelligence, his efforts, his love, his

enjoyment, his happiness, the kingdom . . . . For this bread to become the very 'body' of

the lamb that was slain it has to be the bread of life,—bread that has satisfied, fed, denied

the denials of death, need, domination, sin: the bread of justice."[142] Dussel approaches

here something close to the kind of revaluation of symbols that we spoke about with

respect to Indian street theatre, a revaluation which arises out of opposition to exploitative

structures and a steady awareness of human suffering. The power of the symbols remains,

---

[142]Enrique Dussel, "The Bread of the Eucharistic Celebration as a Sign of Justice in the Community," in *Can We Always Celebrate the Eucharist* ed. Mary Collins and David Power (New York: Seabury Press, 1982), 61.

but the participant in being drawn into them is at the same time propelled outward, towards systems of justice or injustice in the world beyond the ritual. Here, as qualities of the communication of the Eucharistic liturgy to its participants, we have the same crucial characteristics of emancipatory performance, *oppositionality* and *directionality,* which we pointed to in our discussion of the through-line.

Another set of meanings which should be brought to the foreground in a more emancipatorily effective Eucharistic ritual clusters around the bread and wine as Body broken and Blood poured out. These meanings, while drawing participants into the symbols, at the same time function to push them back out into the world of effective action to carry out God's work of justice, dignity, and peace.[143]

Second, in Indian street theatre, symbols are fluid. They appear in the performance as they are useful for the emancipatory intent of the creators. This is not to say that the symbols used in these performances are not powerful, nor that they do not have weight outside the performance, but they are chosen by the performance's creators to respond to a particular situation; they are always instrumental, invoked and enacted in order to forward the emancipatory purposes of the performance. Drawing on this instrumental freedom, it is possible to think of augmenting the symbol system of a Eucharistic ritual with

---

[143]The question of raising self-sacrifice as a value could be raised here. Some feminists, womanists and other presently and formerly colonized people may quite properly object that one facet of their oppression is the expectation of self-sacrifice in the interests of the dominant. I am speaking, however, from my social location as a middle-class Euro-American, from a culture in which consumerism, selfishness, and self-aggrandizement are primary values.

additional symbols, specifically symbolic objects or actions that evoke awareness of those who are excluded from the table because of systems of superiority-inferiority, ethnic or religious hatreds, or other invidious systems of relationships. One such symbol is an empty chair which could stand on the side of or (as long as it is visible) in back of the altar. The chair could be incorporated in acts of prayer as well as movement. Some possibilities:

a. At the Offertory, the chair, after the gifts are brought forward and received, and the people have themselves come forward, the worship leaders could move to the chair and pray with the people for those who lack food, who starve while they produce bread for others, for all who weep and are persecuted.

b. A worship leader could also move to the chair and touch it at the Prayers of the People and lead a prayer, as for example: "Remember, O God, those who are not with us today, those who are alienated from this community, and all who are excluded or cast out throughout the world. We hold before you today especially N and N [*here the celebrant and other participants name individuals or groups who are shut off from full human community in some way*] . . . ."[144]

****

---

[144]The symbol of the empty chair and the prayer above were incorporated in a Eucharistic liturgy, "A Foretaste of the Messianic Banquet," developed collaboratively by Christopher Madeiros, Joan Murray, and myself in June, 1998. The use of the empty chair as symbol may be problematic because of its very different use in the traditional celebration of Passover.

In this section we looked through the lens of Indian street theatre as emancipatory performance at the Rite II Eucharistic ritual. We saw that there is a common or at least an overlapping content to the notion of "emancipation" in both, having to do with the creation of conditions of justice, peace, and dignity for all humanity. Then, using Indian street theatre as a paradigm of emancipatory communication, we discerned a number of possible directions for re-forming Eucharistic liturgy so that God's emancipatory/salvific work might be more effectively communicated. With respect to the through-line, our look at Indian street theatre pointed to a re-visioned ritual whose through-line was more explicitly oppositional, participatory, and directional. With respect to ritual space-time, the paradigm indicated two directions for re-forming the Eucharistic ritual: a. contextualizing the ritual—including the possibility of taking it out of the church into public spaces— to take account of present suffering as object of both prayer and work, and b. dismantling the hierarchalization of ritual space. Finally, with respect to the symbolic matrix of the ritual, we saw in the nimbus of meanings carried by the central symbols a range of meanings which are implicit or ignored in the Rite II Eucharist, but could be brought into the foreground; these include the bread and wine as the product of human labor and actual food for those who are hungry, as well as the image of self-giving love implicit in the breaking of the bread and the pouring out of the wine. And, finally, we noted the possibility of augmenting the Eucharistic symbol system with additional symbols pointing to those who are excluded from the table because of dehumanizing power relationships.

Conclusion

In this paper we have come to an appreciation of both the fecundity and the potency of performance as a medium, and of the way the transforming power of liturgy arises out of its nature as performance. As an embodied process, performance communicates from person to person, from body to body, from heart to heart. As we have seen in our look at Indian street theatre, the power of performance springs not from the cognitive content of what it might say, but from the way the message is conveyed below and beyond discursive language through an underlying unifying dynamic, through the multilayering of space and time, and through symbols that spark emotions and draw people into their rich multivalency and ambiguity, making participants of observers.

We have seen how the ontological complexity of performance—its creation of a new, integral reality out of "dramatic reality" layered with the ordinary, accepted world of everyday—allows vision, revelation, to be lived in and into. We have also come to understand the other side of ontological complexity, how it creates a state of liminality in which what is "normal," 'the way things are," is rendered contingent. We have noted the connections between this double-sided power of ontological complexity and the power of performance to transform both participants and the worlds they live in. And our look at Indian street theatre in particular has given vivid examples of how this power can be used towards emancipation, towards a fuller humanity for all people.

Finally, we have used the understanding of emancipatory performance to shed

112

new light on religious ritual and especially on Eucharistic liturgy *which at its very heart is radical performance.* The point of this exploration is not, however, simply to understand how God's redemptive action is mediated in the liturgy of the Eucharist. The notions of through-line, space-time multilayering, and symbols can be consciously used by liturgists and even by worship leaders in local churches to provide clues for reshaping Eucharistic practice towards emancipatory transformation. This is not manipulation; rather, it is a way towards fuller participation in the saving work of God.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Appavoo, James Theophilus. *Folklore for Change*. Madurai: TTS Publications, 1986.

_____. "Dalit Religion and Culture." In *Prejudice: Issues in Third World Theologies,* ed. Andreas Nearing. Madras: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, 1996.

Austin, J.L. *How to Do Things with Words.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975.

Beck, Renee and Sydney Barbara Metrick, *The Art of Ritual: A Guide to Creating and Performing Your Own Rituals for Growth and Change.* Berkeley: Celestial Arts, 1990.

Bell, Catherine. *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice.* NY: Oxford University, 1992.

Boal, Augusto. *Games for Actors and Non-Actors.* NY: Routledge, 1992.

_____. *The Rainbow of Desire.* NY: Routledge, 1995.

Chatterji, S.K. and Hunter P. Mabry, ed. *Culture Religion and Society.* Bangalore: ISPCK, 1996.

Chatteriji, Sudipto. "*Mise-en-(Colonial-)-Scène*: The Theatre of the Bengal Renaissance." In *Imperialism and Theatre: Essays on World Theatre, Drama, and Performance*, ed. J. Ellen Gainor. London: Routledge, 1995.

Cohen-Cruz, Jan, ed. *Radical Street Performance.* New York: Routledge, 1998

Collins, Mary. "Principles of Feminist Liturgy." In *Women in Worship,* ed. Marjorie Proctor-Smith and Janet R. Walton. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993.

Driver, Tom F. *The Magic of Ritual.* San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991.

_____. "Life in Performance: Reflections on Ritual, Religion, and Social Value," *Soundings Journal* LXXVI, No. 1-2 (Spring/Summer 1994), pp. 63-80.

_____. "Performance and Biblical Reading: Its Power and Hazard." In *Body and Bible*, ed. Björn Krondorfer. Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992. pp. 145-158.

Dulles, Avery, *Models of Revelation.* Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1985.

Duraisingh, Christopher and Eric J. Lott, "An Indian Liturgy for Celebrating the Eucharist." In *Worship in an Indian Context* ed. Eric J. Lott. Bangalore, India: United Theological College, 1986.

Dussel, Enrique. "The Bread of the Eucharistic Celebration as a Sign of Justice in the Community." In Mary Collins and David Power, ed. *Can We Always Celebrate the Eucharist?* Concilium 152 (1982) 56-65.

David, Kennith. *Sacraments and Struggle.* Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1972.

Freire, Paolo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* New York: Continuum, 1986.

Geertz, Clifford. "Deep Play: Notes of the Balinese Cockfight." Daedalus. (Winter 1972): 1-37.

_____. "Ritual and Social Change: a Javanese Example." In *The Interpretation of Cultures.* NY: Basic Books, 1973.

Grimes, Ronald L. "The Rituals of Walking and Flying: Public Participatory Events." In *Drama Review* 22 (4): 77-82

Hashmi, Safdar. "The Right to Perform." In *Radical Street Performance*, ed. Jan Cohen-Cruz. New York: Routledge, 1998.

Hatchett, Marion J. *Commentatory on the American Prayer Book.* San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995.

Heilpern, John. *Conference of the Birds: The Story of Peter Brook in Africa.* London: Faber, 1977.

Holmes, Urban T., "Liminality and Liturgy," *Worship* 47 (August-September 1973) 386-397.

Hughes, H. Kathleen. "Liturgy and Justice: An Intrinsic Relationship." In *Living No Longer for Ourselves,* ed.Kathleen Hughes and Mark. R. Francis, Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991.

Irvine, Christopher. "Celebrating the Eucharist: A Rite Performance." *Theology* 97 (July-Aug. 1994).

Jennings, Theodore W. "On Ritual Knowledge," in *Journal of Religion* 62 (2):111-127.

Kertzer, David I. *Ritual, Politics, and Power*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.

Kidd, Ross and Mamunur Rashid, "People's Theatre and Landless Organizing in Bangladesh." In *Social Activists and People's Movements*, ed. Walter Fernandes. New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1985

Krondorfer, Björn. "Historical and Theoretical Reflections on Play." In *Body and Bible,* ed. Björn Krondorfer. Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992.

_____. "Jacob, Esau, and the Crisis of Male Identity: Investigations into the Seriousness of Play" in *Body and Bible.*

Mach, Zdzislaw. *Symbols, Conflict, and Identity*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993.

Macquarrie, John. *A Guide to the Sacraments*. NY: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1997.

Mnanzan, Sr. Mary John, OSB. "Who is Jesus Christ." In *Voices from the Third World,* Vol. XI, No. 2, (Dec. 1989): 1-16.

Mohanraj, *A Decade with People*. Tumkur: REDS, 1995.

Moore, Sally F. and Barbara Myerhoff. "Secular Ritual: Forms and Meanings." In *Secular Ritual*, ed. Moore and Myerhoff. Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1977.

Nichols, Randall, "Worship as Anti-Structure: The Contribution of Victor Turner." *Theology Today,* 41 (Jan. 1985): 401-409.

Parker, Andrew and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. "Introduction: Performativity and Performance." In *Performativity and Performance*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Pralayan. "Why do we choose to do street theatre? the answer is always political, it has to be." *Seagull Theatre Quarterly*16 (Dec., 1997): 72-88.

Raj, M.C. *Participatory Training Methodology: A Process and Content for Empowerment*. Chennai (Madras): Dialogue Group, no date.

Sahi, Jyoti. *The Child and the Serpent: Reflections on Popular Indian Symbols.* Bangalore: Asian Trading Company, 1980.

Schechner, Richard. *Environmental Theater.* NY: Hawthorne Books, 1973.

_____. *The Future of Ritual.* NY: Routledge, 1993.

_____. *Performative Circumstances: From the Avant Garde to Ramlila.* Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1983.

Schmemann, Alexander. *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom.* Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988.

_____. *For the Life of the World.* NY: National Student Christian Federation, 1963.

Scott, David C. and Israel Selvanayagam, ed. *Re-Visioning India's Religious Traditions.* Bangalore: United Theological College, 1996.

Song, C.S., "An Asian View of Mission." In *Christian Mission, Jewish Mission* ed. Martin A. Cohen and Helga Croner. New York: Paulist Press, 1982.

Srampickal, Jacob. *Voice to the Voiceless: The Power of People's Theatre in India.* NY: St. Martin's Press, 1994.

Strathern, Andrew J. and Pamela J. Steward. "The Efficacy-Entertainment Braid Revisited: From Ritual to Commerce in Papua New Guinea" in *Journal of Ritual Studies* 11.1 (Spring 1997): 61-70.

Stuhlman, Byron D. *Eucharistic Celebration 1789-1979.* New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1988.

_____. *Prayer Book Rubrics Explained.* New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1987.

Thomas, Sham P. "The Use of Various Media for Development with Special Reference to the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad." M Th. thesis, Tamilnadu Theological Seminary, Madurai, India, 1996.

Turner, Victor. *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974.

_____ and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press.

_____*From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. NY: PAJ Publications,   1982.

_____. *The Ritual Process*. Chicago: Aldine, 1969.

_____. "Variations on a Theme of Liminality." In *Secular Ritual* ed. Sally F. Moore and Barbara Meyerhoff (Assen/Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1977.

Van Erven, Eugene. *The Playful Revolution: Theatre and Liberation in Asia*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.

Vatsyayan, Kapila, ed. *Concepts of Space Ancient and Modern*. New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1991.

Wilfred, Felix, ed. *Leave the Temple: Indian Paths to Human Liberation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992.

Warren, Michael. *Faith, Culture, and the Worshiping Community*. Washington, D.C.: The   Pastoral Press, 1993

2945-2